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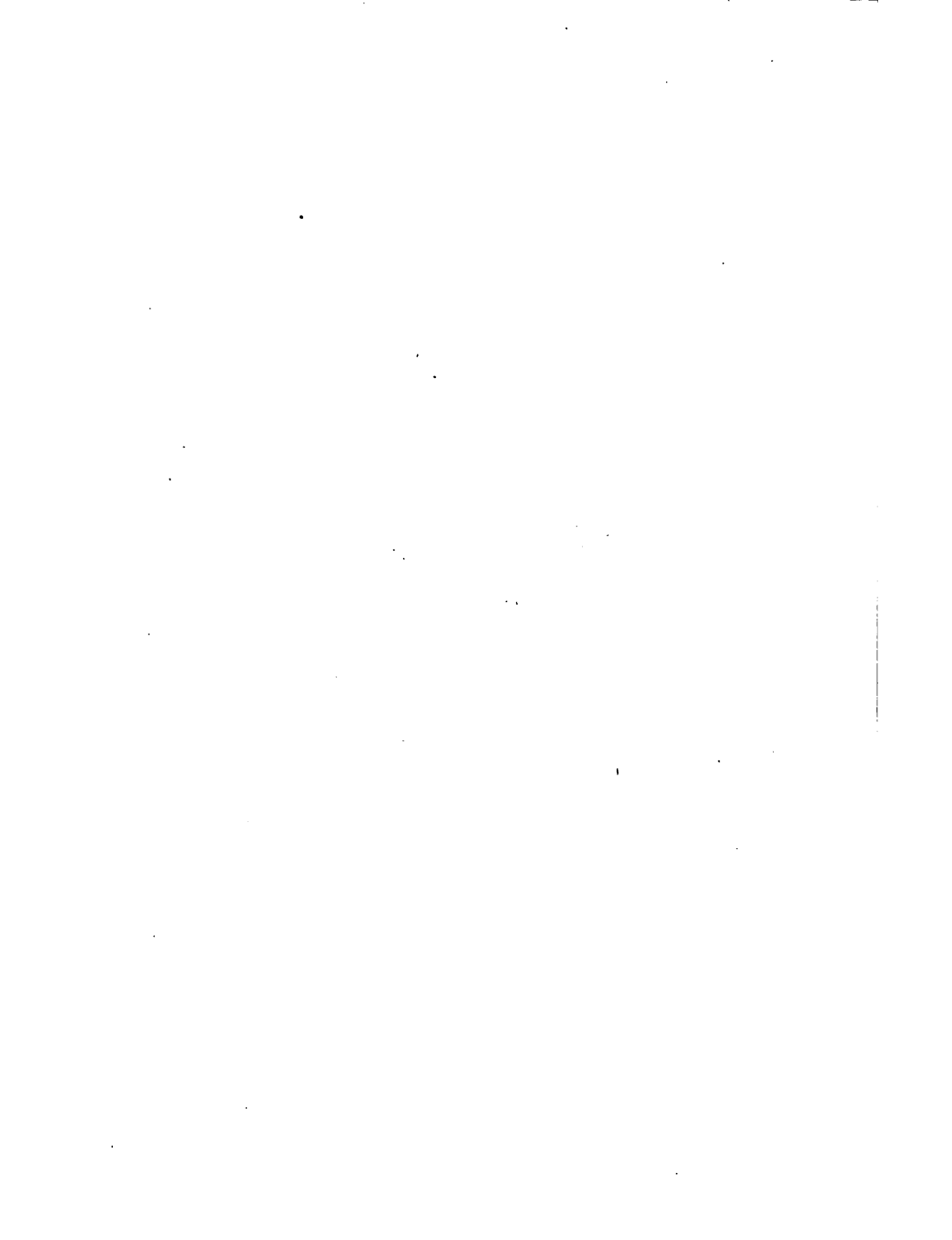
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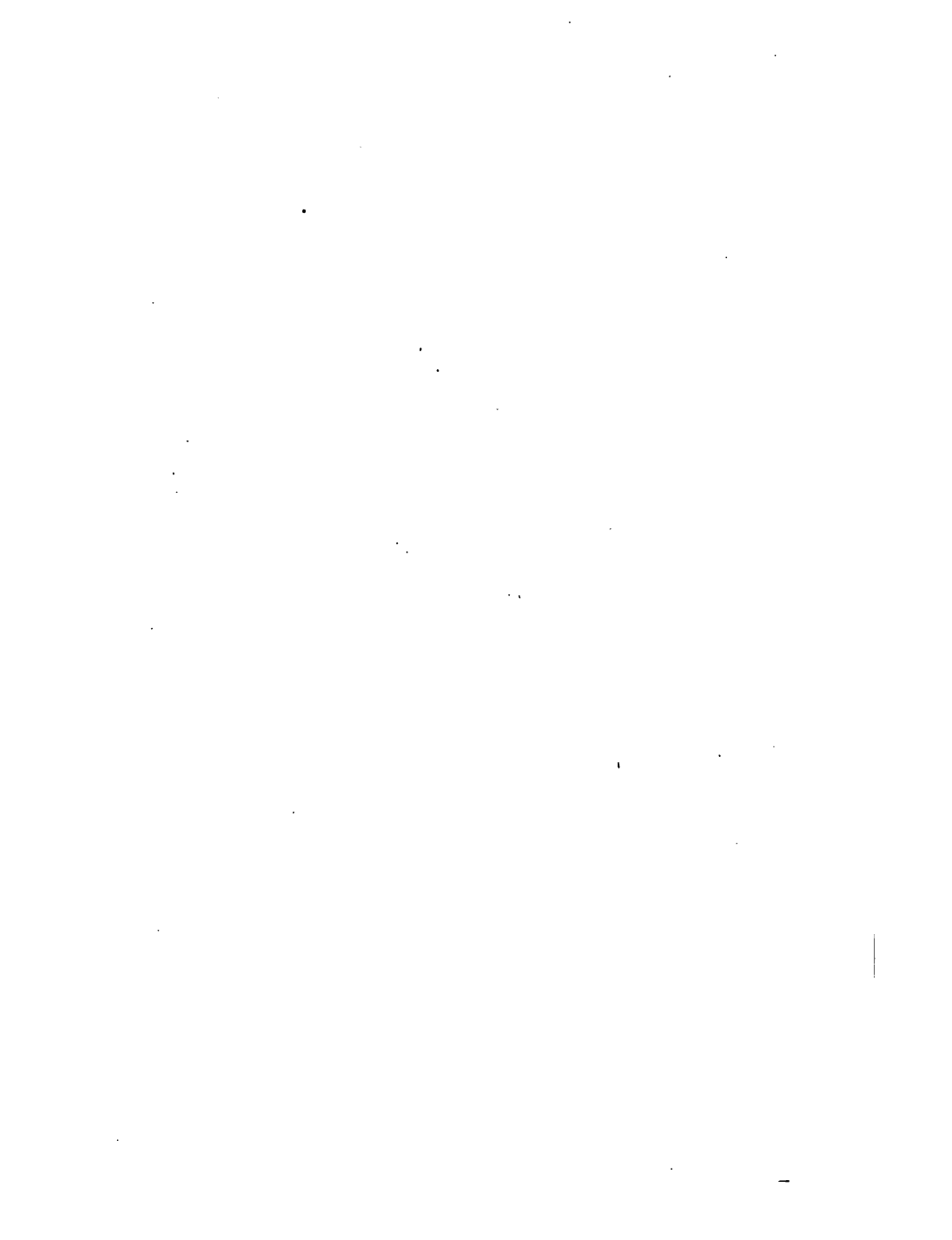
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THE GREAT WAY

THE GREAT WAY

A STORY OF
THE JOYFUL
THE SORROWFUL
THE GLORIOUS

BY
HORACE FISH



NEW YORK
MITCHELL KENNERLEY
MCMXXI



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TO
HELEN FREEMAN
BECAUSE SHE REMINDS PEOPLE OF BEAUTY

Wm

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*For the lips
Of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb,
and her palate is smother than oil:*

*But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp
as a twoedged sword.*

*Her feet go down to death; her steps take
hold on hell.*

*Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life,
her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know
them.*

PROVERBS V. 3-6.

PRÓLOGO

LA GRAN VIA sweeps on everywhere.

It sweeps from God to this earth, and from this earth back to God again.

Perhaps it *is* God. We do not know, and while we are staying on this earth, we never will. Amen. It would be pleasant to find out later on, and we may; meanwhile, whether or no, in some small way or another you, I, must tread the Great Way.

Vaguely, some two "wheres" deep in our two souls, we both know the great secret already, you and I.

But we have no words at hoof to put it into. And therein lies the yoke that hangs on our necks, yours and mine, as we go along together, up hill and down.

Suddenly, in the relief of going down a steep hill or the joy of striving to struggle up a new one, I turn to you and try, as I have tried so many times before, to say to you as you have been trying, perhaps, to say to me:

"If it were not this struggle, it would be some other. The Great Way never ends. Oh, learn if you do not know it, having learned, remember, though for each 'one' of us it begins in some earthly place, and would seem to end in some earthly place, I beseech you learn and remember, remember: La Gran Via itself starts rolling at the knees of God."

BOOK I

THE EPIPHANY ON THE ROAD

CHAPTER I

THE RAMBLA OF THE FLOWERS

FOR the sweetest girl in Spain, it began at Cadiz, that little peninsula of the great peninsula which lies simmering in the balm of the Atlantic, as if Spain and Portugal were a doubled up fist (and God knows about that!) with a diminutive finger stretched out into the sea for the town to stand on, white and glittering above and against the blue.

Here, in the city which, since Carthage owned and glorified it for its abnormal wealth of tin and silver has till recent generations been the old world's sea-garden of luxury, here was Dulce born.

But not in luxury. The town till lately fabulous in riches was now what it bids fair to stay: beautiful in poverty, lazy in misfortune, rich only in palms and memories and in jewels set into the walls of its yellow cathedral; and famous this long while for the delight of its girls and softly indolent with its sensuous men that loll contentedly, between watches of languorous work, at their small, slow, continuous glasses of Amontillado, in the barely carriage-wide twisting streets, and under the sun and drooping verdure of the water-front—like flecks in a delicate canvas, for anent her sensual beauty Cadiz has one virtue, instinctive and incongruous: it is clean, clean, clean.

Here, between the narrow, tall rows of pastel-tinted

houses, twisting-columned and balconied and grilled, white and cream-coloured, green and pink, Dulce learned to walk. And to talk even before that, from the girls—the sung-of girls!—of Cadiz—very beautifully, as it happened, for she took, like a fish to running water, by an instinct sheer as that which makes Cadiz clean, to the castellano, so that she was soon correcting those same sung-of girls, and was never, if you will make the favour, señorita, found biting off the tails of her words in the surrounding manner of her comrade Andalusians.

Then, one night, from the heat of poverty and pressing custom and oppressing religion, she walked out of it all, alone, in secret, along the causeway lapped by the cool waves of the ocean, to the mainland, and commenced her own particular Gran Via, which led her deviously, terribly through Sevilla, where she danced for a while in the streets, with a small tambourine and smaller feet—and sang a little, too. The voice was clear, and wonderfully sweet. But it was too unstable . . . or too something, anyway, to be much successful with Spanish-folk in the open air, which seemed to play tricks, make impolite demands, upon it. . . . And therefore casting aside all thought of it with a debonair gesture of the mind, very much as she would bodily have tossed by a recalcitrant rose or violet, without even this frail armament of sound she went on . . . to other cities, kind but less kind . . . and through the tumbling country north and north, as if the magnetic pole were drawing her, and still on, to the east a little, but forever north and forever north, and into the province where Spain is old Spain no longer, but bustling and active—though lazier at that than even Italy; where churches and convents have been burned down in sudden blind rage, where socialism and anarchism and a bullet are all alike, and alike misunderstood and alike used; where a big bright gay and rich city, not noble like Madrid yet larger still, has sprung up from a village in the plain to be the port of entrance into Spain—the sparkling bangle of the Pyrenees, the modern garden

of the Mediterranean, the Little Paris of the south of Europe—Barcelona. To this yellow seething city, Dulce's feet were led by La Gran Via.

And this day, as the evening sunlight slanted from the blue and lavender and pearl-white of the foothills and the sky, it was leading her along the city's Gran Via Diagonal, through the golden haze that shone on herds of snow-white bearded goats, into the Plaza Cataluña, and across its palm-lined paths to the Paseo Gracia, and along, along, along to the suburb at the foot of the pretty little mountain of the watch-tower, Tibidabo, and back, disheartened and glad both, and again across the brilliant Plaza into the lovely Ramblas of the Old City.

God! God! What a life this, without a voice harsh enough to raise, in a town where music comes only from blind folk anyway, and dancing is paid for in theatres! Dio! Dio! Dio! But with a sigh she said she did not care, and thought she meant it. Perhaps she did, for she was beautiful enough, and knew she was, even in a country of very beautiful women; and she had not starved yet, and her one room in the Calle del Carmen, a street as full of bustle and loud noise and food and finery and drink and good-nature as any other in Spain, was comfortable enough and, thanks to God, her chest full of clothes and tambourine enough—in addition, she hoped, to voice enough after all, if necessary. It would be too bad to scream with so nice a voice, but still . . . if the worst came up again!

So with a heart at bottom light enough, she walked, with and against the tides of labourers and businessmen and gentlemen strolling homeward-bound, into the Rambla Caneletas, and on under the towering planeta trees to the Rambla of the Estudios, across which gazes the fashionable little Royal, with its green and yellow wicker tables and chairs set on the sidewalk, and along it under the scream of birds that has dubbed it Rambla of the Sparrows, to the next, Rambla of the Flowers. Here, suddenly, she stopped. Just beyond her, buying a

violet *boutonnière* at the stand of an exquisitely pretty, hatless girl, stood a man's figure that she recognized, although through the shifting crowd she could but glimpse it. He was tall, stalwart, lighter-skinned, lighter-haired than the graceful limbed Spanish men about him. His derby hat was worn American fashion; his suit of rough yellow-white was more loosely worn than their melting browns and greens. He was smiling at the swarthy, pretty girl as she pulled and patted the violets into his coat. For a second Dulce hesitated; then she walked straight up to him, holding out her hand:

"How yo doo doo? Pleece to say yo 'gain. Preeety efening, no?"

In his surprise and confusion, he had taken her hand for a brief moment; now, with a laugh, he dropped it.

"So you speak English? You deserve some flowers for that! Make me the favour to choose them yourself." And having dropped another coin into the flower-girl's hand, he walked away, leaving her staring after him.

"Name of white God, but you are bold," said the flower-girl, gazing at her with admiration. "I would not be selling stale violets if I had your pluck. But you did not succeed, at that. Let me tell you something for nothing. He is a Mejjicano, and you would have done better if you had spoken Spanish."

"Holy God, but what a liar you could be!" exclaimed Dulce. "*He*, a Methicano! As for Spanish, you simpleton, I never speak it. I speak castellano. If he is a Methicano, do him the favour to pronounce him right! But he never is—he spoke good English!"

"You do not know whether it was good or not," said the flower-girl. "He is just what I say. As for your own tongue, call it madridese, not castellano, if you are going to lisp like a noblewoman. Your speech is as thick as two thieves full of pea-soup. He is from Mejjico, I tell you, and he stays right over there, at the Continental Hotel, where he is acquainted with some

Americans. He is as rich as he looks, for he has coffee in the morning here at the Royal, and his lapel is under my finger for a violet before he drinks it. Now, use you this information as you choose, but let me tell you to be careful, and not to play such a trick as you did too near the hotel, lest his American lady acquaintances pour boiling water on you, or have you arrested, or something. These North Americans come here knowing nothing—not so much as the meaning of the word ‘peseta’—and yet before you know a peseta yourself they do some clever thing that puts you in jail. And for my part, I will say that I admire them for it, for I am quite a respectable young woman, and I have no contempt at all for virtue in foreigners.”

“Be careful of your tongue!” said Dulce quickly. “Or in the name of the Virgin you will have something from me, you gutter-hen, that will draw more blood than boiling water does! Do you think that I will let you air your voice at me, unless with pretty manners and about your own cheap business? Keep that coin he gave you for my flowers and buy a gag with it, will you, or do you mean to stand there like an old she-goat with a beard and tell me I am not respectable?”

“I would not tell you that for a million-peseta lottery ticket,” said the flower-girl, “for I would never get it. But I would for two cents.”

Dulce looked at her, slowly, from head to foot and back again.

“Well,” she said, thoughtfully, “I will not kick you in the stomach for that, much as you deserve it, for I am such a peculiar girl that if I love anything I love the truth. So he is a Methicano? How did you find out that?”

“He buys his flowers of me,” answered the girl, “and we chat. In my trade, that is well enough. And I only spoke to you out of kindness, thinking you could not know Barcelona very well. I have seen you trudging it often enough, God knows, and things are seldom done

that way here. Such as are bad are bad indoors. If I do you a wrong I am sorry for it. Do you know Barcelona?"

"Better than you do, if you are as virtuous as you pretend," said Dulce, "and in the name of God's white mother I can scarcely believe it. I have never seen you before to notice you. Why have you noticed me?"

"There is little else to do," replied the flower-girl, "except to think about those who go by often. And any poor girl would envy you with your face."

"Now that I notice it, *you* are very pretty," said Dulce. "If you had a dress like mine, you would be as handsome, or more so. And let me tell you that you need not envy me. There is plenty of fun for everyone in the world, I suppose, but I have little that I do not pay a lot for. I would like to be a flower-girl myself, if it were not too late. But it is. If you really are respectable, you will not understand that; but so it is, so take my word for it."

"I really am," said the flower-girl, "but I do envy you, at that, with such fashionable clothes and manners as you have. I have often thought of your way, but I do not know enough, and I would be afraid. I am a fool, I guess."

"You are no fool," said Dulce, "or you would not have spotted me the quick way you did. And to be as pretty as you are and respectable too, is not for many a poor girl."

"It is handsome of you to say so," said the girl, "when you are so fashionable as well as lovely. And you have a beautiful nature, too, for not hitting me a punch on my face when I spoke to you as I did. Would you mind kissing me before you go?"

For a moment Dulce stared at her. "You do not mind, when we have *both* told the truth?"

"It would make me proud," said the girl, "when you are so distinguished and ravishing. I have always admired you, and felt angry when you went by looking so proud."

"Holy God, but I am no one to be proud!" said Dulce, kissing her. "I should like a respectable friend, and if you will love me as much as I love you, we will be pleasant and affectionate with each other. I am really not as bad as you think, for I am as poor as you are, I am sure, and only do it for my living. And I have no one to confide in, for I have a lover and he knows nothing of it."

"I know you have a lover," said the flower-girl, "for he has bragged about you."

"What?" cried Dulce, with wide eyes.

"I know no more of him," said the girl, "than I do of the Mejicano, nor in any other way. He was here ten minutes ago, and bought two reales' worth of roses for you. Knowing how fashionable you are, I put in a jacinta, in the middle, for nothing, to sweeten it. Will you wear these home to him, too?" And she pinned to her a large handful of heavy violets.

"Well, well, but you are a keen one!" marvelled Dulce. "What do you *not* know? We will be great friends, I can see. What time do you go home for your own supper?"

"I go home in an hour," said the girl, "but not for supper. I had lunch to-day, so for to-night's supper it is my sister's turn. She has lunch to-morrow."

"Are you as poor as that?" cried Dulce. "If you get off, though, you can have supper with me."

The girl's pretty eyes widened vastly. "You will let me?"

"But I will let nothing else!" exclaimed Dulce. "What is your attractive name?"

"Lola."

"And mine is Dulce. Mind you pronounce it as I do, 'Dool-thay,' or I will not like it. You Catalans claw up the Spanish tongue! I will teach you to pronounce castellano. Do you know the hosier's shop, in the Calle Carmen? I live over that. I chose it for location, you see, not for fashion. Four flights. Come at seven. Keep

the money that the Methicano gave you for me, and bring something to eat that you especially like yourself. Jaime works in the coal-yards at Mont Juich, and this is pay day. So he is sure to bring in a bottle of wine with him—if those flowers *were* for me! If they were not, you will help me beat him up, will you not, darling?"

"In the name of God I will!" cried her friend.

"And after supper," continued Dulce, "we will go for a drink to the Royal."

"The Royal!" Lola's eyes stretched far in their excitement, and then fell by instinct down along her dull red dress.

"I have one very beautiful costume," said Dulce, "that I will wear, and another that is quite lovely too, though a little old-fashioned, that I can pound you into. Puff you rather, for it will be too big. Mine is blue silk, very light in colour, and in making it I copied a Paris picture. Delicate blue silk, just the right amount too low, yet with long hanging sleeves. And a short, tight skirt. I wear a large pale yellow drooping hat with it. The other one is white lace—far too big for either of us, as I say, but we can tighten it around you somehow, with pink ribbons."

"Mi Dios!" gasped Lola. "The Royal!"

"Good-bye, darling," said Dulce; and they kissed again.

"Come at sharp seven, with whatever you like."

"Adios!" cried Lola. "You are an elegant friend for me, instead of kicking me as I know you ought."

"And you are very handsome, and were gracious about the violets," added Dulce.

"They are a little stale, so I could not sell them anyway," deprecated Lola.

"They will last to-night," said Dulce, "and with the roses and jacinta, and some French scent that I have, we will smell very lovely. Adios!"

"Adios, my beloved!" And Dulce went on down the Rambla to the Street of Carmen.

CHAPTER II

THE STREET OF CARMEN

HAVING climbed the dark stairs and sharply closed her door, she slung down her hat on to the bed, pulled her table into the centre of the room, examined the contents of her cupboard, walked loudly across her creaking floor to the window-sill and with her elbow swept aside its pots of mignonette, gazed down into the street and as far as she could into the adjoining square, drew in her head, and having dragged from under the bed a wooden box that held her finery, knelt beside it for a long while, hurling one thing after another across to the snowy counterpane until it was covered, from rail to pillow, with a mad succession of promiscuous colours—from perfect lace to rotten velvet, from lovely personal linen to men's red handkerchiefs for the bull-fight.

Before she could be satisfied that the best was tossed forth, a knock, unaccustomed sound, came at the door and she sprang up.

Lola stood eagerly trembling on the threshold, her brown hair re-combed, a white rose to the rear of it, and a package hugged firmly in the crook of her arm.

"Come in, darling!" cried Dulce, hauling her forward. "Jaime is not home yet—what do you think of that? I begin to distrust those flowers! But we will never mind, my dearest, if he has had the bravery to deceive me. We will have a grand supper in any case, and go to the Royal alone if necessary. Look at the bed there, and the colours on it! It is gay, what? It looks better than with him in it, I assure you."

She pushed Lola on to it, crumpling the bright fabrics

to the pretty girl's anguished discomfiture, and took away her package.

"Poor Jaime! He is so stupid, I sometimes grow impatient. There he works in the coalyards day by day, and never thinks of anything more clever! I often say to him, 'You make it a virtue to yourself, that you work for both, never thinking I am worth something better.'"

"I am sure, darling, you are worth something more clever," said Lola, sitting stiff with awe among the finery. "But how he must respect you! And surely, he washes off the coal, does he not?"

"When—when I insist," said Dulce. "But what I say is, why get it on? He could be a scene-shifter just as well, and he is, sometimes, but it is only when they need extras at the Opera. I say often: 'If you were not stupid, you would shift scenes through the season—at the Opera, too, which is fashionable!—and trust God to care for you in the summer.' Well, it hurts his feelings, and then I cry, like a fool. But he *is* stupid, or he would know I could never make a week's wages run a month."

"Still, how you must love him!" sighed Lola.

"Oh, yes, yes," said Dulce. "I would never stop with him, if I did not love him madly."

"It must be wonderful to love someone," said Lola. "I—I have thought him handsome; and with the smudges off——"

"Oh, yes, yes," said Dulce again. "You must know, that I would never be a sponge to him, if I did not love him passionately. But he is dull, Lola, as you shall see. Holy God, but you have brought mussels! Are you fond of them? Cooked, too, and that was sensible, for we could never cook them here. Jaime will have rice with him—if he comes with those flowers! Mi Dio, but we will fix him if he has deceived me! Set the table, dear."

This was a natural thought, for Lola was busy setting it.

"How clever you are at that!" Dulce paused as she sprinkled her violets with water, and as she did so, some-

thing as bright as the scattering drops caught her notice, and her lips parted in her astonishment.

"Lola, what are you crying for?"

Lola gulped pathetically.

"I am envious, beloved. You have such a happy and fashionable life, with a devoted lover, and so much to eat! I would never be intelligent enough!"

"You are not intelligent when you say as much," answered Dulce. "To be sure, I am clever, and I know it. But so are you, at selling flowers, and smiling so gaily at dull strangers who never think of you again. I never could do that. As for my lover and enough to eat, both are poor food considering what I ought to have, but I am cheerful nevertheless. Besides, I have parted with what I can never have back, and that is no fun when one thinks of it. I would never admit so much to anyone but you, which shows my devotion to you; but it is true, let me tell you."

"That is just what I would be afraid of," said Lola. "I think I am a coward by nature. I cry sometimes when I get so hungry. But I always get frightened from your way, by what an old woman in our house said to me one night when she caught me thinking about it."

"What right has an old hag to frighten you?" said Dulce. "What did she say?"

"She said a fearful thing. She said, 'Look here, girl. Do you know what it is to be a bad woman? There is an old saying: *She kills herself. But first she kills her parents, friend, and lover.* That is what it is, girl.' Then do you wonder I am frightened, Dulce?"

Dulce was silent for a moment.

"Yes, yes. Mi Dio, that is dreadful!" she said with a little shudder. "But, Lola, why do you not, then, fear to be my friend?"

Lola jumped to her and threw her arms about her.

"Darling, I am not *that* much a coward!"

Dulce kissed her. "Dearest," she said, "old women are the same as priests. They frighten one at nothing.

God forbid I should tell anyone to be bad, Lola. But I am no coward, and let me tell you something: if you must be good, be it for its own sake, and not out of fright. What I have to say to myself is, I did not put myself in this world, and I will not be unhappy in it because I saved my neck the only way I could. Spilt wine is bad for a white cloth, I admit, but I shall never try to clean it with tears till I am dull enough to take myself to the next world. Which I would, rather than snifle in this one. What good is it? Besides, I must eat occasionally, and Jaime, devoted or not, being a coal-heaver, you see, must eat three times a day. What made you say the Methicano was so rich?"

"His clothes and his air and his doing nothing. Are you still thinking of him, Dulce?"

Dulce laughed. "Of course I am. Who would not?"

Lola gazed wonderingly at her. "But—but why, since you know his station?"

"You are a baby, Lola!"

"But why?"

"Because, if you must have the truth, because I think I could really love a man like that—station or not, poor or not."

"When you love Jaime?"

"Oh, yes, yes, I love Jaime passionately," said Dulce quickly. "But he *is* stupid, dearest."

"And you are so clever, my darling!" Lola gazed lingeringly at the riot of colour on the bed.

"Well, here is someone who is not!" cried Dulce, springing up and stepping to the door.

She threw it open, and Jaime, strangely clean and odorous of barber and bouquet, stood blinking at the extravagance of candle-light and colours.

"We have company, my pet!" cried Dulce, kissing him fondly. "And I see she is no liar, nor you either, for you have brought the flowers according to your story to her. And the wine! But how you must love me—Lola darling, it is Amontillado! Stop staring, Jaime!

I too know your flower-girl, and she is here for supper! We have been acquainted for an hour, and are very intimate."

Lola was blushing, with bright averted eyes, and Jaime stood with open mouth, staring blankly at Dulce, his dark serious face struck dully into surprised lines, his dog's eyes fastened on his comrade with wondering dog's love.

"Quick!" whispered Dulce, impatiently plucking at his fingers. "Act the gentleman, will you? Put on some caballero manners and greet her in style! This is an occasion! Go do it!"

With abrupt effort of stumbling, willing obedience, Jaime walked forward and bowed over Lola's nervous outstretched hand.

"You are charming!" said Jaime with agonized polish and miraculous success. "You are very charming. I should like to pass the night with you!"

"Thank you very much," said Lola, blushing modestly and curtsying, "but make me the favour to wait until I am married."

"And you say you are not clever, dear!" cried Dulce, delighted. "I could not have done more prettily myself, Lola. It was a lady's answer! Come here, Jaime, and kiss me—I am proud of you! Now, Lola darling, sit down. You are the guest. Jaime will wait on us. We will both tell him how we met. It started in a quarrel, Jaime, because we disagreed about a passer-by as I was stopping at Lola's stand for some violets. She said he was a Methicano when I would have had him from Nueva York. And she was right, the clever thing! Pull that cork, dearest, and sit down with us."

And presently they were eating noisily and talking as much so, to the clink of forks and glasses and the loud music of laughing . . . like castanets against a happy tune. . . .

"Holy God, but it is eight o'clock!" cried Dulce. "We are going to the Royal, Jaime, and Lola will be no easy

girl to dress. She is too pretty to be anything but fashionable."

"The—Royal?" stammered Jaime.

"Why not? It is your pay day—and you know I found twenty-five pesetas this week. Had you forgotten that?"

"I have never known such luck!" said Jaime to Lola. "She has found paper money three weeks running, and moreover she finds silver more than seldom in the street! She is so modest, she looks forever at the ground. Even without the money it brings her, I like her modesty!"

"She is in every way clever," said Lola, softly.

"Look," cried Dulce. "Here is your gown, Lola. What do you say to it?"

Lola gasped as her hostess pulled up the mound of lace.

"Madre de Dios, but I could never wear it! I would blush every minute, trying to be a lady!"

"Nonsense," said Dulce. "Jaime, smoke faster. You would grumble if I put you in the hall while we dress, so make a thick smoke. Have you a brother, Lola?"

"Two," said Lola. "Why?"

"That is all right, then," said Dulce. "Smoke as you like, Jaime. But, then, as we are gentlefolk to-night, for manners' sake put on airs and make the smoke thick.—Come, my dear!"

Summoning Lola to the side of the bed, she sat on the edge of it and unpinned her frock. "Dios, but I see you have nice habits about you, dearest! There—you are now just a few respectable linens and a woman. But in two minutes you will be a lady."

Whatever she was, it she was in that time—lost to view utterly below her throat in a drooping cone of tarnished lace that streamed about her figure like a cloud that upheld her pretty head, while it solidified in folds upon the floor.

"Dio, Dio, will you look at her?" laughed Dulce. "She is like a Murillo saint, is she not? But you will look no

saint when I get the ribbons on you!" And she began to loop up the skirt, tying it in layers against itself with deft pink knots and bows, and baring the pretty arms to the elbows by similar works of art upon the shoulders. "Well, well, you *are* a work of art, at that, though no Murillo! You look funny, but stylish at the same moment. Have you seen the pictures of the new Paris fashions? There are stranger ones than this, let me tell you. That loop—the one down there below your knees—is exact, only the waist was tight. That we cannot do, for it would never look as if it were on purpose. As you are, no one will think you a mistake, anyway. Turn around, darling. I have a buckle of brilliants for that same loop, right between your knees. But we need a sash first. Here, catch this!" And she drew a lengthy ribbon from the confusion of stuffs on the bed. Its satin scraped swiftly between Lola's fingers and the great wealth of lace bunched in above her waist and stayed there, pressed by the broad pink band knotted and drooping through a quick, crisp bow with long trailing ends. "Now, the buckle!"

"Dio!" gasped Lola, gazing almost in terror down at herself, and Jaime's eyes grew large with admiration.

"Now," said Dulce, "help *me*," and together they disarrayed her and spread forth the soft blue silk.

"Do you see that, my dear?" inquired Dulce, stretching forth her arm. "That is a lesson for you, when one is as poor as I am! Let me tell you, though I may go without my dinner I do not go without my lotion-pot. It is half the battle to keep cheerful. You will learn much from me, Lola."

The blue silk glided down from over her head and clung sheening about her.

"Dio mio!" exclaimed Lola. "If I thought you beautiful before——" and her voice stopped in token of her delight.

"It is simple," said Dulce. "But that is *more* than half the battle—to have a thing fit you. There, we are

done, my dear, except for hats. Now, Lola, hats are the very last point in fashion. My yellow kind was done for years ago, but that helps it, in my case, for I know how to tip it, and if you wear an *unusual* thing *well*, then the battle is done, and nothing to say. What do you think of it?"

Having pinned it with one hand, she slapped it with the other as she questioned.

Lola gasped again, and the slow voice of Jaime said: "You are beautiful, Dulce mia!"

"Mind I stay your 'mia'!" cried Dulce. "When I am dressed like this, I tremble for you, Jaime!"

Jaime trembled for himself as she said it.

"Now for *your* hat, Lola. With all that white, you need a black one. White hats are fatal. They are disgusting. Never buy one, Lola, whether you marry or whatever you do. No matter what a shopman says to you about them, he lies. They decorate a window, but never a woman. Black is the secret, especially for dark women, and that is why we Spaniards are forever in mourning. I wear the yellow for two reasons—contrast, and because I *can*. Well, I have only one black one. Here. Holy Mother, but you look a dream in it. How lucky! Jaime, we will finish the wine now, to put even more sparkle into Lola, and it will make us just in time, in the fashionable crowd before the theatre. Come, draw up!"

Again the voices babbled over the tinkle of glasses. But suddenly Dulce forgot to drink, and the polite small-talk of her charms ran between Jaime and Lola while she gazed at the wall, her thoughts far off somewhere beyond it and her eyes grave and fixed.

"What ails you, Dulce?" asked Jaime.

"Yes, darling!" cried Lola. "Have you heard what Jaime and I have said about you?"

"No, I am sad," said Dulce.

"Sad?" cried Lola.

"Sad?" cried Jaime.

"Well, well, I have excuse enough!" said Dulce. "I was thinking it is the thirteenth of the month."

"And are you superstitious, dear, very?" asked Lola.

"Not very," answered Dulce. "But what month is it? October, no? Well, this is an unlucky day for the Spanish poor. On October the thirteenth, Ferrer was shot."

"But Dulce mia," said Jaime, staring, "what business is that of yours?"

"Yes, darling," cried Lola, "why should that sadden you?"

"Are you Spaniards?" demanded Dulce, her voice reproachful. "And are you poor? Must not every Spaniard, except the Government and the priests, think of him every little while? Well, never mind. They will be putting a statue to him sometime, having murdered him—as they have done to Colon, who discovered everything on earth for us except the North Pole. Let me tell you that Ferrer loved the people. The *people*, I tell you! Mi Dio, there is excuse for Lola, who is a baby; but you are a man, Jaime, or ought to be. Dio mio, but I could weep whenever I think of it! And as one of the people I have more reason to weep than you know, Jaime! Lola knows more there than you do! A girl can tell things to a girl! But I must not sadden you. Only, it is so new to see you two sitting there together, and to have some family life! It made me think of the future, and your asking me to marry you, Jaime! How stupid it was of you!"

"But I never meant it for an insult, Dulce!" cried Jaime. "I thought you had forgiven it long ago!"

"Well, never mind," said Dulce. "I was thinking also of Ferrer, who loved poor people. And got shot for it. And I was thinking, too, that when people try to kill the dear sweet good-looking king for the matter I could claw them, whether they are poor or not! The stupid fools, they never stop to think it was not the king did it! As you both can see, I am a peculiar girl, and I give more thought to public matters than the next man does. Let me tell you what I have been told: it was the priesthood

killed Ferrer, for it would never do for poor people, as I am, to read and write, as I can. Well, when the king understood he would have pardoned him. No one need talk to me against the king. But the priesthood—and mind, now, that I choose my word and do not say religion, or the Church—the priesthood won. Such is our country for poor folks!”

“Dulce, Dulce!” stammered Jaime, as Lola’s eyes stared widely. “Be careful what you say! You do not know any such thing!”

“I believe it,” answered Dulce, “and indoors I will say what I like. I have heard it said openly in the street, and not only that, but in the Royal, by aristocrats. And it makes me sad!”

“Do not be sad, darling!” pleaded Lola. “See—you have made me cry already!”

“Holy God!” exclaimed Dulce, breaking into tears. “Life is a very sad thing! Sometimes I think what might happen to Jaime any minute. Or to me, which is much worse—for I am clever enough to take care of both of us, while he is not, poor stupid darling! Lola, my own, promise me that if I should be terribly injured, or die, or be shot, or disappear, you will marry him and take care of him, will you, Lola? Perhaps you could make a scene-shifter of him! If I die, or anything awful happens, will you marry Lola for my sake, Jaime?”

And she sobbed aloud.

“Yes, Dulce mia, yes!” wept Jaime. “I will do anything you ask me to!”

“And you do not answer me, Lola!” sobbed Dulce loudly.

“Yes, beloved, yes, if he will have me!” sobbed Lola. “I can never be so clever for him as you are, but I will do my best to save, and we will buy a big monument for you!”

“Holy God!” wept Dulce. “We must be going to the Royal. Think how I will weep over you in heaven,

watching you together! Come, set your hat right, darling! How sad life is, when we think of death!"

"Oh! Oh! Oh! Yes! Oh!" sobbed Lola.

"Oh! Dulce! Oh! Oh!" sobbed Jaime.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" sobbed Dulce; and together they proceeded downstairs and through the narrow *calle* into the Ramblas, to the Royal.

CHAPTER III

THE ROYAL

THE pretty place was crowded, and Lola, hanging to both of them tight and close, burned deep red with self-consciousness as they pushed their way through the narrow aisles of tables under the yellow and green awning into the restaurant.

"We must sit here," said Dulce, as chairs were set back for them from a small glass-topped table, "till theatre time. Then we can have places outside. Which chair will you have, Lola? Here, where you can look out, or here, where you can see the special dining-room back there?"

"Here," whispered Lola, sinking into the chair with its back toward the door, and feasting her eyes on the exquisite blue and silver little room beyond, which filled up a vista of preserved fruits and rainbow-tinted confections in files of glass cases for one side, and white-napkined tables and pretty women and dark handsome men for the other.

"Cervesa—tres," said Dulce to the uniformed waiter who stood bowing while Jaime sat hesitating. "Stop fidgeting, Jaime." And as Lola still gazed about, and Dulce hummed, "Do Not Cry, Bebête," to the tinkle and thrum of a band of street musicians, three beers were set upon their table, and once more they drank, once more their voices resounded against each other.

"We get as many eyes as matadors would," whispered Dulce. "We are certainly handsome, Lola, and these clothes are very lovely. Jaime, if you would sit straight and speak more carelessly to the waiter you would be more worthy of us. Holy God, but I am happy!"

"So am I!" whispered Lola.

"That is right, darling! And you, Jaime?"

"I would be a little happier," said Jaime, "in that nice café down by the dock, where the noise is so comfortable. Still, I am very happy, Dulce!"

Again Dulce hummed, now a little more loudly, as another trio of fiddle, guitar and mandoline halted outside in its stroll.

"Lola, did you see that lady nod and smile at me? I swear to you that is simply because she has seen me before somewhere, or else purely on account of our attractive appearance. We are friendly, we Spaniards, are we not? We are a queer people, Lola—if you have never noticed it—more democratic than the whole rest of the world, for all our caste and our fine young king. And he is more so than the rest of us. I happen to know it from a friend at Madrid. No wonder holy God saves his life every five minutes!"

"Dulce, Dulce mio," pleaded Jaime, "make me the favour not to talk so here so loud!"

"Why not?" demanded Dulce. "I am happy, and I am saying only good things of both king and people!" She beckoned the waiter. "Hombre! Aquí! Is there room outside now?"

"Si, si, señorita!" smiled the handsome boy. "Will you make me the favour to come with me?"

"Bring three more beers, then, señor, and put us at a table on *your* side, mind!" And the three, Lola again bright with embarrassment, rose and followed him to the sidewalk, Jaime slouching in a brave effort to swagger.

With their surrounding neighbours they made a strange company. Here was an aristocrat, old, pious, absinthe-drinking, who had bowed to them as they sat down by him, and moved his glass that they might share his table, their own being too small for three. There, in front of them, were a man without a collar, and his hatless wife, smiling and exchanging pretty civilities, unembarrassed, with them and with patricians alike. Even as Dulce had

voiced so tactlessly, Democracy was here beneath the awning, whether gold Monarchy reared its head at Madrid, whether rouged Anarchy slept in some quiet room across the way. The summer-like October night was beautiful with stars and soft with Spanish air that stirred the great leaves of the snake-skinned planeta trees before them in the Rambla. Now came the click and scrape of a brown leaf, falling dead to the trodden yellow dirt before its time. Now, the rustle of a wakeful bird stirring above, gently breaking the silence of the great feathered army that strangely haunts the trees of this one short block, sharply drawing its boundaries at corner and corner above the daily bird-market of its gayer-plumed fellows who had slipped away, at sun-down, in myriads of little wooden cages. Off below the further trees was an angular glimpse of the next Rambla, Lola's Rambla, its big branches shadowing its empty flower-stands, its white street lights falling across to the scrolled stone front of the old baroque Church of *Nuestra Señora*, and helping to cast its dreaded Jesuit shadow into Dulce's street. Now and then, between them and the hard yellow earth of the Rambla, street-cars, some with horses, some without, bobbed by under the spreading planetas; just opposite, the theatre drank up the people rambling toward it from up and from down. Ever and again, twos and threes of blind musicians strummed and sang, their little boy-apiece garnering centimos from both kindly rich and kindly poor. Once a piano on wheels, dragged by a small long-eared mule, drew up at the kerb, and the mule's still smaller leader, a diminutive girl, climbed earnestly on to the hither wheel and played the brow-beaten piano more earnestly still, while her father fingered a mandoline and sang, his blind eyes eternally rolled up. . . . And now more music, more musicians—always blind, blind, blind.

"That is from a fearful sin!" whispered Dulce to Lola. "What a pity, what a pity! Do you notice, darling, how informed I am?"

Their second beers were drawing to a close, and she

leaned luxuriously back in her chair, glancing about for the waiter.

"I am happy!" she said suddenly. "I have never been so happy in my life!"

"Nor I," said Lola.

"Nor—nor I," said Jaime.

Again she looked about for the waiter, and clapped her hands for him; but though he was nearby and turned, he did not come to her at once, for he was in conversation, so serious that for a whole instant at a time he would forget to puff his cigarette, with a gentleman in evening clothes a few tables away.

Dulce, waiting patiently to catch his glance, overheard their exchange of words.

"You tell me what, my boy? That I am in your debt for a peseta?"

"If you will excuse me, yes, Caballero. It was in change, a mistake on my part."

"Well, here it is, and welcome, hombre. But I do not remember it. When was this?"

"Three days ago, señor."

"Three days? No wonder I was puzzled! But why did you not tell me at the time—or as soon as you found it out?"

"I had but just seen you, señor, and I mistook you for an Americano. So I thought you did not understand our money, and I would wait until you did, señor. I did not wish to confuse you."

"I thank you, hombre. You were thoughtful. But what did the manager say? Did he not complain?"

"He did not know, señor."

"Then you paid it yourself? But I know something of wages here—you get but a small sum, and at the latter part of the week, you could not afford to be three days without this money!"

"No, Caballero. But I could less afford to hurt your feelings!"

The boy's eyes went toward Dulce, to reassure her of

his attention; and the gentleman, though so lately mistaken for an American, evidently was not mentally alien to Spanish nature, for he offered the youth no money largess of interest on the peseta, but noticing that in his earnestness his cigarette had actually gone out, he took the stale thing from his fingers, tossed it to the sidewalk, and proffered his case. Then he as promptly showed himself not fully familiar here, either, anyway as to tobacco habits; for a limping street-scavenger had pounced for the fallen stub, and as he saw the wretched thing pick the wretched thing up, the gentleman with a shiver leaned swiftly forward and gave him, too, a cigarette, not knowing that this living-maker had garnered the refuse not to smoke himself, but to take back to the factory.

The waiter had stepped toward Dulce; and as he did so, inhaling ecstatically, and his expression a conflict between that ecstasy and an apparent regret that he had lighted a thing of such quality now instead of saving it for his wedding night or the day of his First Communion, and as his Caballero sat back from amazing the scavenger, she saw the gentleman's face.

"Dio mio, Lola, but it is the Methicano!" she whispered.

"Yes, Dulce, I have been watching him. And he has seen you, too."

"And remembers me?"

"I am sure of it!"

Dulce glanced swiftly toward Jaime, but she could not see his face, for the waiter now had hidden that away.

"Hombre," she asked, "what is that pretty drink that the gentleman has?"

"Vermouth, señorita. And vermouth is a drink for any gentleman!"

"Three vermouths, hombre!"

Lola looked rapidly at Jaime as the waiter stepped away. A small dull cloud had come into his face. But

Dulce's prompt hand came down upon his arm, and it vanished.

"Jaime," she said, her voice as caressing as her name, "that is the Methicano that I told you of! Except for the dispute about him Lola and I would not be intimate friends this minute—think of that! And though he will not know it, we will drink to him when the vermouths come, no, Jamie?"

"What you like, Dulce mia."

"Well, Jaime, I like friendship, for one thing!"

"And me, Dulce, for another?"

The question was so unlike him that she stared at him in surprised silence before she answered.

"You are stupid, Jaime. Never ask girls for compliments. Wait for them to be offered, then even you may get a few!"

"I adore you, Dulce!" He whispered it, and mantled in the sudden deep colour that swept her face as she motioned him to silence, she looked instinctively toward the gentleman in evening clothes. Lola's eyes saw Jaime's see theirs. The waiter, with three glasses, stepped between.

"Are you well served, Caballero?" And with this high tribute to Jaime, he smiled at him and then at Dulce.

"Well served, well served, friend!" stammered Jaime, flushing.

"Indeed, prettily served, prettily!" cried Dulce. "See, Jaime, the waiter takes me for your wife. You fetched a compliment where you did not look for it, just as I said!" And at her words he brightened.

"I need not name the toast," she added, touching his glass and Lola's with her own. And she and Lola drank with eyes a-sparkle, while Jaime merely sipped, his eyes less happy.

The Mexican gentleman had turned his chair a little toward them.

"What do you two say," said Dulce, setting down her glass, "to having some oysters? Lola, my dear, nothing

than oysters could be more fashionable, or show off one's manners to better advantage!"

Lola's eyes glistened.

"Oysters, Dulce mia?—see Jaime, I have been bold enough to use your own word to her!—Dulce, darling, I have eaten many Portuguese oysters, but never iced by a restaurant! Only, my friend, mi querida, you will be spending a fortune if your eyes stay that bright!"

Dulce clapped her hands for the waiter so loudly, and called "Aqui! Hombre! O! Aqui!" so often, that the handsome boy came running.

"Three plates of oysters, friend! And be sure to bring the forks that are most delicate, and plenty of ice. Have you noticed, hombre," and she detained him by her slender fingers on his sleeve, "how pretty the ice looks in the lights of the window here, with the glassed fruits doubled in it?"

"Yes, I have noticed, señorita, but the ice is not so bright as your eyes!" And the boy was gone.

"I do not like oysters," said Jaime.

"Well, Jaime dearest," said Dulce, sighing, "I know they are not good-looking. And all I can think is, that the first man who ever ate one, must have been a nasty dirty thing. But to clever people, they are delicious; and if you cannot be gentilhombre enough to swallow them, give yours to Lola, who you can see craves them despite her low birth."

"Darling," said Lola timidly, catching her with trembling fingers by the arm, "could we not send back the oysters if you thought them over?"

Dulce stared at her.

"*Why?*" she demanded.

"They—they taste like a tin watch," said Lola.

Dulce's stare widened.

"*A what?*"

"When I was a very young child I ate my watch one day, when we were especially hungry," said Lola. "I have always remembered it."

"Well," said Dulce slowly, "in such a case I would never *make* you eat them, Lola——"

"Oh," cried Lola, eagerly catching her arm again, "indeed, I promise you I would *enjoy* them, darling! I love to be reminded of the time I had a watch—had a watch to *wear*, I mean! You see, we never got it back. My sister who sleeps with me says she hears it tick, which used to frighten me. But it never *had* ticked, Dulce, and since I am grown up I have found that out. And you must know by now, my Dulce, that I love you more than anything on earth, and would never dare to offend you, even for poor Jaime's sake, lest I break my heart; but I feel friendly with Jaime because he loves you, which puts him and me in the same hospital. And I think he has his feelings hurt over the oysters!"

Dulce turned slowly from Lola to Jaime, and back again, a little surprised anger mixing with her wonder.

"Do you think, Lola, that I am getting the stupid boy into debt? I can assure you he is the one who will pay, but that is for manners, and not out of his wages! Let me tell you, I would order a watch for you, if they served them here! Have you forgotten, darling, the find of paper money that first I, and then *he*, mentioned to you? I am not likely to forget that money, I can promise you that, Lola!" And as Lola caught her hand under the table and pressed it feverishly, she raised her other hand and poked Jaime's cheek with friendly tolerance.

"You can have such manners, Jaime, when you like! So do eat the oysters and enjoy them. Think, you are several years older than I am, and you act like a child, sulking when there is nothing to sulk at! Can you not be pleasant, when I have such a happiness in finding a great friend to give me amusement and affection? Anyway, here they are, you baby!"

She patted the waiter's arm, sending him away.

"Lola, there is nothing like oysters to show elegance with, as I told you. Now, I have no doubt the Methicano

is still looking at you, and you can show a lady's manners to him if you will watch how *I* eat them!"

In the small space of chairs and tables under the awning humanity had thinned a little, leaving enough for intimate gaiety; and friendly looks and laughs were passing from table to table. In the softly lighted Rambla leaves were still clicking now and then, as though death had no heart to be less suave than the falling of an occasional brown leaf on to yellow-brown ground. Though grown seldom and more seldom, music still came up, and was now tinkling in a row of three blind men and a bright-eyed boy. Through its melody a carriage ground its eternal red-spoked circles to a stop before the restaurant, and the tall Mexican rose and went out to it, and stood at the kerb for a moment smiling, and deprecant, hat in hand. Dulce noticed how deferentially the hat stayed at his side.

The detail, so deep in the spiritual mark that it made upon her, was an inevitable one, for her filched view of him was from sidelong eyes—eyes that lent her, for these quick few moments of her stilled posture, a transient, smooth dash of Orient vivid as a colour, subtly mixed with her peninsular loveliness as hue or figure of an Eastern *manton* with the habit or the indolent air of Spain.

"To-morrow?" she could hear him say. "Certainly, and with pleasure! I had given you up. Surely I understand. You are tired. To-morrow! Good night!"

Dulce knew that she could glimpse, too, if she would, between the surrounding heads as the carriage rolled away, the fair, frank lines of lovely foreign faces—she was sure they would be lovely; the soft sheen of blonde hair—she was certain it would be the exquisite feminine gold that glinted always in her thoughts of the human beings of England and America.

But though she had swiftly planned her swift debonair movement to do so, against the impending instant that now had come with the Methicano's courtly "Good night,"

a thing swifter, a power strong as an articulate voice, had come against *her*, and Dulce did not look.

It was the moment, eternally recurrent but potent only seldom, and then, vigorous, dynamic with the nameless force named destiny, when some precious flower of the casual sends its perfume, vocal as speech, from around a turn in the path of life, saying, "I am good and beautiful; seize me; drink the wine of my newly inspirational nature; make me yours!" or else, "Fear me; shun me; go by me, blinded-eyed and breathless; my splendour is leopard-skinned, my scent is poison!"

Youth and health hear both these messages. It is only the weary pyramid of years or else the pain that is crowned with thorns that can teach that the two voices are one voice, that the speech is wordless and only a perfume; that, because the soul is translator, the first cry is to the pure, the other to the unhappy.

To Dulce, in this moment of the pinnacle of her curiosity, the sudden voice was that of humanity's huge loyal friend of which she had made her hot outstanding enemy: Society. And to such percentage of her soul as was capable of cowardice, Dulce *could* not look.

The grind of the red-spoked circles passed behind her—and with it, the brief shadow of the bogie from upon her. The tall foreigner, his hair softly gleaming in the artificial light and light-coloured, in contrast with his black clothes, as that that she had imagined for his vanished ladies, had returned to his chair.

"After all, do you not enjoy the oysters, Jaime?"

Lola was gladly swallowing, forming her fingers along her fork in likeness of Dulce's, forgetting the taste of the passing oyster in her eagerness to learn the delicate manner.

"Did you hear me, Jaime?"

Jaime's eyes were upon his plate. He had dutifully swallowed, but his eyes did not raise, according to their custom, like those of the happy dog that has done well.

"Never mind him, Lola," said Dulce. "He sulks,

the stupid boy, once in so often. Did I tell you, dear, that oysters are fashionable, or did I not, answer me that? See, the Methicano has ordered some! Aqui! Hombre! Three vermouths!"

A woman back of her was whispering to her husband.

"It is not right! The foreigner is without shame, with her man there beside her! It is not the girl's fault. She is common and so pretty! These foreign men are without shame!"

"It is the girl's fault," whispered back the husband. "She knows better, with her man right there! She is shameless!"

"You take the man's part!" said the woman impatiently. "He is a foreigner, and has a contempt for our customs! Take me away!"

"Dulce!" whispered Jaime, imploringly, suddenly looking up. "Dulce!"

But she did not answer him. She was talking to Lola.

"My dear, when I am as gay as this, I really feel as if I could be a lady! I know I could! I am not boasting when I keep saying I am clever! I have been a little of an actress, you know, for once, when my luck was down, I was two whole nights in the chorus of the Alcázar. That was where I learned to use my fingers with these graceful gestures. And if your Methicano chooses to watch, my dear, it is none of Jaime's business, and never will be till he knows enough to pay the whole rent. Holy God, but I am happy!"

And she ate her last oyster and lifted her glass of dwindling vermouth.

"Do *you* not feel as if we were ladies, Lola?"

A trio, blind, and with its customary fourth of brown-eyed boy, had halted with mandoline, and voice this time, and violin, upon the sidewalk, and a thin *Servillana* filtered through the company.

"Dio, but I would like to dance!" cried Dulce. "That takes me back to Sevilla quicker than a train could!" And her arms waved above the glittering table, her white

slender fingers snapping in the rhythmic cracking beats of *castañuelas*, and her eyes meeting, meeting again, and perhaps again, the foreign eyes that were constantly upon her. As the tune stopped, she again sought Lola's hand beneath the table, but dropped it to fetch her purse from out her waist, and put two coppers on the plate that the small boy was proffering at their table.

"Play more, boy! Tell them to play more!"

The small boy bowed. "Si, señorita! Gracias!" And after a moment the thin voice of the blind woman rose again: "Do not cry, do not cry, *Bebête!*" and Dulce hummed with it.

Lola bent her head nearer to her friend's, to listen, and as the notes came to the lingering refrain, it was Dulce's humming voice that the people were hearing.

An approving laugh, a ripple of urging hands came at the end, and the plate of the smiling small boy was quickly filled all over again.

Dulce smiled even more than he did, all about her; and as the blind three, smiling with the strange sympathetic humour of the blind, twanged into Barcelona's favourite song of the hour, she stood up in her place, and her voice broke into the dulcet words of the apache waltz, the "*Cavalier de la Luna.*"

*"We have no use for the dance new and catchy,
We damn good sorts who slide up through the night,
We want the real moonlit waltz named Apache,
Supple, seductive, quick, wicked and light!
Silently each chap grabs hold of his sweet one;
Then makes her skirt flirt the dirt to the moon;
Swiftly, abruptly he hands her a neat one;
Then comes the whirlpool tune—
La la la la la la!"*

And, swift upon the lilting chuckle of the stanza's end, Dulce's voice came into the sensuous refrain and distilled itself exquisitely through the silence of the quiet Ramblas:

*"Friends, this is the Brown Waltz,
Plain-girls-and-boys-o'-the-town waltz,
Come-pick-me-up-knock-me-down waltz,
Where you solicit, and kiss it or miss it—
Oh, la la!
Yes, this is the Moon Waltz,
This is the laugh-of-the-loon waltz,
Just-try-to-kiss-me-too-soon waltz—
Night! . . . and light! . . . and—
Ha-ha-ha!"*

An instant's burst of approving hands, of quick cries of "Sh-sh-sh!" and, her cadenced voice graphic as her swaying body, she glided into the refrain's repetition with its further words exhilarant, insinuant, intoxicant.

*"Oh, this is the tune, friends!
We're Cavaliers of the Moon, friends!
Each boy swoops down like a loon, friends,
Wild with moon-madness, moon-badness, moon-gladness—
Oh, ta ta!
Ah, you know the brown tune!
This is the talk-o'-the-town tune!
This is the rip-in-the-gown tune—
Dance! . . . and trance! . . . and—
Ha-ha-ha!"*

Chatter had ceased entirely, and that strange little miracle that grows up suddenly among men once in a long space had come upon the guests of the Royal to the tune of the insinuating French song—the little social miracle of community of vision, unicity of feeling: what Dulce felt, they saw. To all of them, in their oneness of mood, the Ramblas, the restaurant vitality, the essence of Little Paris all about them, became Big Paris, but the big Paris of its *détours*, its by-paths of architecture and of humanity, lit by her voice, which was the moonlight—the green moonlight of great spaces, but which perforce streamed down into the narrow streets and upon the evil people which were her song; streets *and* people narrow

and evil, yet whose love—love whatsoever—can be translated into romance and beauty by those who sit without and think of it . . . or sing of it. . . .

And as if he were there to picture the Apache, Jaime's collar had turned up about his ears, and he was shrunk down and back in his chair like someone forgotten and sleeping.

Again a loud burst of approving hands, cries, now, of "More! More!" and Dulce sang again, her body swaying to the melody, line and line on to the reaching of the giddy refrain again:

*"Oh, this is the tune, friends!
We're Cavaliers of the Moon, friends!
Each boy swoops down like a loon, fr——"*

With a sickening crash, her table fell; and another. Two women screamed. Jaime had jumped and swooped. The waiter was running, and another waiter. Lola's arms went about her.

The tall foreigner was on his feet, blood seeping down his sleeve. The waiters and three men held Jaime.

"Holy God! Holy God!" said Dulce, and she shrank back against the window.

The musicians crept away.

There was a babble of voices.

People were leaving.

A municipal guard came running down the Rambla.

The green stripes on his white uniform made a confusing zig-zag in her eyes as he jumped by her into the crowd, and she stood helplessly against the window, trembling. She was alone there. Everyone had left her. Even Lola had left her. She saw the empty tables, and the street in front of her, and heard the din of voices at one side. Above it, she heard the tall foreigner's voice.

"Let him go. Let him go. It is nothing, I tell you. He may be drunk. It was my fault. Let him go. I tell you it is nothing."

Then again came the hateful din of voices, and she clung desperately, with slipping hands, to the window back of her. Hot terrified tears sprang to her eyes as she felt her palms sliding downward on the glass, but suddenly she felt Lola's arms around her again.

"Darling! Darling! Dulce! It is nothing! My God, oh, my God, your face! Darling, darling, it is nothing, I tell you! They will let him go! Dulce, they are going to let him go! Dulce, Dulce, I will scream if you look so! Your face! Oh, Dio mio, your face! Dulce, I tell you they will let him go! The Mejicano says that it is nothing, so they will let him go! Dulce! *Dulce!*"

"Get him away, then," whispered Dulce. "Get him away, and *lose* him for me! Get him away, do you hear?" And as Lola left her again, again she sank back against the window, covering her face, trembling.

The municipal guard came over to her, but she would not take down her hands, or answer him, and when he had left her, once more she felt that she was alone—hopelessly, utterly alone.

She knew that Lola was gone, that Jaime was gone.

Even the din of voices now seemed distant.

But when she dropped her hands like two dead sticks of wood and looked about her, she saw faces not only here, not only there, but everywhere—inquisitive faces, gazing curiously at her. The two waiters stood by, hesitating in the doorway.

As her hands had dropped, and her dazed eyes stared about, the voices had dropped, too, into dead silence. And as if he were some figure in a picture, she saw the tall foreigner, still by his table with the blood on his slashed sleeve, standing, watching her.

She felt hideous colour sweeping up from her throat, but even as she tried to take her eyes from him, she saw him step toward her, his head raised, his hat falling in his hand to his side . . . as it had fallen when he walked out to that carriage. . . .

She felt his elbow lifted near her, toward her; and she heard his voice.

"Señorita, I must bring you to your home. Will you make me the favour to take my arm?"

She struggled in her dry throat for three words: "I am ashamed!" And then struggled again, for though she felt them in her mouth they made no sound. "I am ashamed!" But still they would not sound, and gulping, she placed her shaking arm under his, and followed by hushed voices and staring eyes they walked out into the Rambla.

CHAPTER IV

CABALLERO OF THE MOON

HER mind whirled as, leaning against him for mental support though she was bodily shaken too, she walked beside his tall figure into the Calle del Carmen—passing Lola's dark deserted flower-stand, passing the baroque church with its semi-modern, semi-Moorish arabesques, passing the blackened shops—into the blacker hallway. Here she broke from his arm and climbed before him. Igniting her candles she stared with eyes that did not blink in the waver of flaring light, at the gaudy riot of clothes and ribbons, at the deserted chairs, at the wreck of the recent little feast, now far back in memory as if the sudden arm of Jaime's knife had hacked it away from her life and cast it back across a century.

Rising among the stale food was a bottle not quite empty, and she absently lifted it and set it, with a glass rinsed at her washstand, at the edge of the table, in a space swept by one clattering swathe of her arm.

"Make me the favour to drink that," she said. "It is worthy of you, no matter what your caste. It is Amon-tillado"; and as he sat mechanically at her bidding she hurled herself face-downward across the bed, dry-eyed, soundless; save for a twitching at her wrists and ankles, motionless.

When she had heard him push aside the bottle and glass, she roused herself, coming to a sitting posture on the edge of the disordered bed, pushing back her hair with both hands, their fingers trembling.

She felt his eyes upon her in a waiting look. Her own were cast down, her under lip was dented by her small white teeth. Presently she looked up, breathing quickly

but meeting his eyes squarely, with a quality of forced fearlessness in her dark steady gaze. Her voice was low, not steady at all—yet determined, with the same forced character.

"Caballero . . . I do not know whether in Methico you have a great meaning in that word, but we have here in old Spain. . . . Caballero, I have this to tell you . . . that I am ashamed for the first time in my life. Never was I ashamed before, even in the beginning, when I left my father's home far down in the south—in Cadiz. And I have not even blushed since very early in the fight; yet I blushed over there at the Royal to-night, inside of me if not outside, where I know I was very white, if I can believe what my sick stomach told me. I am blushing even now, for my soul, if I have one, got redder still when you came over to me, like a Don to a Doña in trouble, and said as no man ever said to me before, that you would fetch me home. . . . Caballero."

Though he seemed to strive for some word, he did not answer, and his eyes had fallen before hers.

"That soul of mine, if there is anything left of it to go where it belongs when I die, had got as red as your arm still must be where Jaime knifed you. You make light of that, and you may be correct enough; but I would cheerfully and gladly see him cut into small pieces and fed to a dog for it, although the day I die myself I will still be fond of him, poor idiot thing, after the way I always have been fond of him, such as that is. And as for you, Caballero, I would as cheerfully and gladly get down on my knees and pray to you as I used to do, and still pretend to do, to the Virgin and her Saints. I would cheerfully and gladly let you take me out in broad daylight and kick me the whole length of the Gran Via, as a show for the people at noon, from here to the bull-fight, through all the streets where I have made my living, so you left enough life in me to kiss your hand at the end. . . . Caballero."

He raised the hand she spoke of with a tremor of protest.

"I would, Caballero. I would let you kick me up the whole steep hill of Mont Juich, and throw me off the top of it, over the fortress wall where Ferrer was shot, and my ashamed soul would be kissing that hand all the way down till my body hit the dirty black coal-yards or the clean blue Mediterranean."

"It was my fault," he said, looking up swiftly and then down again. "And—and you should not talk like that! What gives you such thoughts? They are terrible!"

"In my line, life is terrible," said Dulce.

Again he looked at her, again his swift lids fell, covering the vague disturbance in his eyes.

"Shall I alter my thoughts for you, Caballero? I am a Spanish woman, and I can do even that for you. Life is not terrible then, if you say not. The men never think so, for they do not have to. They bring their money to the Trudge Market, and there are we doing the——"

Once more his swift look met her eyes.

"To the *what?*"

"To the Trudge Market. That is what I call it. I am quite clever, and I occupy myself thinking a lot while I trudge, and calling things names."

"You—you are a strange girl."

"Yes," said Dulce, "that is just what I often call myself, and it has a lot of different meanings, too. There is one place in the Bible, which I got the devil for reading, by the way, especially as the one I got hold of was not the regular Spanish Bible, though it was in Spanish, where it uses that same word 'strange' to mean just such women as keep the Trudge——"

"You—you must not talk like that!"

"I have noticed that men do not like it. So I should have known better. But you are the first one that I ever wanted to obey. If you say I must not, then I must not."

In their silence, he rose suddenly and walking over

to her clothes-box, began slowly to replace, with nervous fingers, the gay fabrics scattered about it on the floor. As his unaccountable labour came nearer to the bed, she slid off of it abruptly with a strange look of fright, and sat staring at his movements, wonderingly, from a chair.

She drank in every line of his slender face, dark though so much lighter than a Spanish Spaniard's; of his slender body, graceful as the bodies of her countrymen but taller—somehow, she thought, stronger; of his light, waving, glinting, heavy hair, heavy like money, yet vital, full of life. Only his deep eyes she could not see. She had not known their colour yet. In the sunlight, she had been too filled with excitement; in the candlelight, though it had shone it had not shown.

"Caballero, make me the favour to tell me your name—before you go. The given name. The last I do not ask."

"José. José Luis. My friends call me José Luis—both."

He had reached the bed and was lifting the gay ribbons in clusters in his hands.

"Why—why, Caballero, do you put the things away?"

He did not turn as he spoke.

"We. . . . They. . . ."

"Cab—señor—" She spoke sharply, in a kind of terror. "Señor, I—señor, though I spoke to you to-day and you knew what I was and why I spoke—to-night, I have not asked that of you—I did not expect that—Caballero, I have not forgotten your arm. I will bind it for you before you go. Yes, yes! I plead with you to come here!"

She had risen from the chair and he came and stood before her.

"It is truly nothing, señorita."

"It is everything. Dulce is my name."

"It is nothing, Dulce."

"I did not hope for you to call me so, señor. I thank

you. And I thank God.—Make me the favour to take off your coat.”

He did as she bade him, in silence.

“And the linen shirt, Caballero.”

Hesitating for a moment, he disengaged the wounded arm.

“Oh!” she breathed, sharply drawing in her breath.

“It is dry already, you see. It is not much.”

“It is very much. The undershirt—is it expensive?”

“No, Dulce.” There was a little nervous quiver in his laugh and she flushed crimson as she stepped to her rickety dressing-table.

She returned to him with a pair of small scissors in her hand.

“Can you lift the arm, Caballero?”

“Yes—Dulce.”

“Make me the favour to rest it on my shoulder.”

She trembled violently as he did so, and the scissors shook as she raised them to the sleeve. Slowly, cautiously, quivering, she cut the sleeve away from around the clotted spot. Once it pulled perceptibly and again she drew in her breath. “Holy God!”

“It did not hurt.”

“It hurt me, Caballero.” She drew off the severed sleeve and dropped it to the floor.

“Dio mio! Can a man’s arm be so white? It is as white and smooth as mine!” Then she bit her lip and stooped to regain the sleeve. Cutting a long strip from it she stepped to the washstand and dipped the end of it in water. She pressed the wet cloth to the sticky remnant on his arm. At last it fell away.

“That, white Caballero of the Moon, I shall keep for ever and ever. It is so red it shall remind me to be ashamed for the rest of my life.”

“You must not say that, Dulce. It was my fault.”

“If you say so, it must have been. But I know better.”

She was trembling again as she tenderly and more tenderly bound the wound.

"There—it is done now, Caballero." She turned away from him and stood by the window, her voice almost a whisper and trembling as her body as she spoke. "Caballero, will you do one more sweet thing for me? Just one more sweet thing? Will you let me call you by your name before you go?"

"I—I do not intend to go, Dulce."

She turned swiftly, her shaking hands stretched out instinctively before her.

"Señor, señor, I beg of you! I cannot pay you that way! In the name of white God I cannot! Oh, I beseech you! Let us have plain speech, señor! I tell you, since what you have done I would walk with bare feet through hell for you. Only not that! Oh, I—I do not know how to tell you what I mean! Help me by trying to understand, señor! Though there is better blood in me from my line, far back, than you might think, still I am an ignorant girl, señor, and though I can sing a song, or could ape a lady with a little training, still my speech, for all its castellano lisp and drawl, is uneducated, and I do not know as I stand here how to tell you. Look straight in my eyes, Caballero, and try to understand the few stupid words as I say them: Caballero, *it is through you that I am ashamed!* You have taught me to be ashamed of how I live! Caballero, all the pride left standing in me from an old race of haughty people, fallen into the starving dust of Cadiz as they may be, is burning with shame—is *squirming*, so help me holy Virgin!—as you look into my eyes and hear me tell you now that to have you stay here would be like my having a holy pure man-saint to stay with me! . . . So in the name of God, señor, I plead with you to go!"

His slender face grew slowly red, then slowly white as, still gazing into her eyes, he stepped closer and closer to her. He seemed to be vainly summoning words that refused to come. She thought, as his face came near to hers, that the colour she had hunted in his eyes was violet—it was so deep a blue. A huge fear, queer to her, new,

and terrible, lit her own big eyes and sent strange trembling up and down her body. She needed unreasoningly to cry out, and could not. Her eyes were holding his, his holding hers, in a riveting power. She felt his naked arm again upon her shoulder, throbbing against the coursing quiver of her shaking form. She lifted her hands to shut away her face, striving and striving to bring them upward in the whelm of soul terror that had come upon her, but they merely stayed hovering between his body and hers and she felt the fingers of his free hand groping to find them.

At last his voice came, low, halting, husky.

"I want to stay! I—I want to stay!"

Her eyes, unable to waver, widened even more, two terrified brilliant black discs of questioning, searching, agonizing unbelief, her lips opened as if to scream.

"Holy God!" she whispered. *"Holy God!"*

CHAPTER V

FLOWERS OF THE SUN

GOLD morning sunlight poured slanting into the room, gilding the potted mignonette along the window-sill. Dulce tiptoed through it softly to her door, and having pulled this close behind her, leaned out over the deep square well, into which parody of a patio the soiled roof-glass filtered a diluted sky-colour down to the street level.

"Aquí! Hombre pequeño! Here, you, limpia botas! Come up here!"

A small yellow pretty-faced boy scrambled up to her.

"Clean boots, señorita?"

"No, little botas. Here are two pesetas. Keep a *real* for yourself, and spend the rest for roses. Red ones, and good ones, with long stems. Go to the girl nearest the corner, on that side. Mind that, now, and do not say where you came from. And mind you come up quietly."

"Gracias, señorita!" And he scrambled down.

Dulce went softly back into the room, and put it in order, setting its discard bit by bit outside the door, and decking her dressing-table with green and blue ribbons where the sunlight shimmered on from the tender green mignonette; fetching new water, smoothing his clothes in layers within the cupboard, covering her chest and the dull chairs with Castilian laces and two vast, rich-coloured mantles of Manila; all to the music of his quiet breathing.

Ever and again she stood by his pillow, gazing down at him. "Sleep on, José Luis! Sleep on, my own!"

When the boy came she kissed him and sent him away with a second *real* and a whisper. "The saints bless you for coming quietly."

Once more she stood beside the bed, the flowers in her hands. "Sleep on, my own! If it were not a wickedness greater than any I have ever done, I would wish you should never wake! That you were dead, having kissed me. That you would never kiss again, except such saints as desired it!" She began to lay the flowers, one by one, upon the coverlet. "Mi Dios, but it looks as if I had my wish, and I were paying for it!" She smiled as she put another rose, and another, over his body. "There, my beloved, my all but God, you will feel that on your cheek when you wake up! If it kisses you there, it is no more than I have done, God be thanked!"

She went to the window and leaned out, gazing into the awakened street. Shops were open. Men strolled leisurely by to work. Already music was abroad. Already, Jaime must be in the coal-yards, smeared with black powder.

"Where did the poor thing sleep, I wonder? Dio, Dio, but I cannot bear to think of a broken heart this day!"

"*Do not cry, do not cry, Bébête!*" floated up to her in the shrill voice of a blind woman to the tinkle of a mandoline.

"You are right, you poor blind thing, I shall not!" she sighed. When she drew in her head, he was blinking, wondering at the colourful, sun-lighted room, at the soft sweet fragrance of its air.

In a voice as soft and sweet, "José! José Luis!" she cried; and slipping to her knees, encircled his limp arm in both of hers, then lifted forward his head and kissed the thick glinting sunlit hair. "It is time for coffee. And time for rolls. And you are not dressed. What would Saint Peter say? Look at the clock!"

"Would he say that? Are there clocks in heaven, Dulce? Yes—I see one!"

"My own! You talk so at this hour? But I have earned it, for look at the flowers to greet you, Caballero! While you slept, I have been out to the Rambla, buying

them for you. Can you believe it, José Luis?—Holy God, what a liar I am! When you love someone with all your soul and whatever brains you have, I suppose it is fashionable to tell the truth! I sent a boy for them.”

He clasped her hand about a rich red bloom and brought the fingers and the flower to his lips.

“They are like you, my sweet.”

“What did you call me?”

“My sweet. It is your name in English.”

“Talk to me in English, José Luis. I know only oysterce and biff-steck—which should be enough for anyone, I suppose, after all! Especially when you put that other strange word ‘pècece’ to them. I will go out while you dress, and buy breakfast. Will you be quick?”

“Kiss me before you go.”

“No.”

“Yes, instantly!”

“No!” She bent down close to him. “No. No. No. No.”

Then she went to the door. But she turned, and came back to him.

“But I always do things by sevens—it is lucky. Therefore: No. No. No.”

CHAPTER VI

TRAFFIC

"WHAT does it all mean, I wonder!"

They were on Tibidabo, high above the city, whose arteries stretched below them as if drawn on a map. This afternoon the sky was cloudless, the warmer middle hours having drunk up through the thirsty sun all the gentle haze that had lain on sea and mountains in the morning; now the ether stretched up into one vast clear blue, and beyond the city lay as vast a sheet of blue deeper yet as brilliant, touched, miles and miles away, by the mark of the Balearic Isles; while behind them, the hills extended in higher and higher piles of white and green and lavender into mazes of circling mountain forms that led the tortuous way to the Pyrenees.

"What, Dulce?"

"All *this*!"

Yet when she said "all this" she did not intend the beauty spread about them, though her eyes were absorbing it contemplatively; she referred to the beauty that, apart from all seas and skies and mountains, was within them, between them. They sat on a little balcony of a deserted pavilion, perched over the funicular railway whose car climbed steeply up toward them now and again, to bring a few passengers or to fetch a few away. The month was growing cool, and it was late in the year for many visitors. They sat alone, undisturbed, above the big panorama.

"I do not know, Dulce. I suppose everyone wonders what life means."

"Yet you did not like it when I called it terrible. I

have very often wondered. But never this way, José Luis, never this way!"

Talkative as her nature was, her every fibre demanding the expression of herself, and few of words as her lover's habit seemed, yet she had learned more of him than he of her.

She had learned of his home in Mexico, a little of the story of his mixed parentage: of his Mexican mother, asleep, he said, under a great coverlet of gardenias—a Mexican flower; his favourite flower; rich, queerly white, and with the lost perfume of Eden, and beyond these words, ineffable . . . though he had said so as if striving for more wherewith to describe them and stretch his speech away from the sacred name they spelled for him, so that there had crept into her cheeks a colour of pink that had been both of gratitude that he had mentioned her at all, and of pain, and that hastily she had hidden from him, helping him on to talk of the strange lovely flower and its strange lovely scent; of his father, a roving expatriate less of the States, indeed, for these he had abandoned after mere citizenship, than of England, whence he had wandered in his youth, with the visionary programme of the English younger son—to find, finally, silver and a wife in the second country of his adoption—childless till late in life, an old man, in fact, when José Luis was born, and now—so sadly, for it was even after the son's recent parting from his home—"asleep," with the Mexican flowers and the Mexican Flower they covered; of the boy's education, fashionable after a fashion, and the custom that sent such colonial sons of money to Paris and old Spain—always Paris, and old Spain. But in his own case, London too, for he had been to London.

"But you love best Nueva York, no, José Luis?"

"Yes, I love best Nueva York."

"Then I love best Nueva York, too."

He thought and called himself American: with a double, possibly a conflicting pride in his assertion of attitude and word, the pride of Mexico in her separation from

Spain, though he clung, in speech, aristocratically to the maternal castellano—aristocratically as Dulce; pride in his father's long naturalizationship in the great dominating continental country bordering their "Mehico"—in which one word he stepped definitively away from Dulce's madricense to little Lola's "j" in speaking the written "x" which little Lola probably could not write.

"I said always, 'I shall live in Nueva York when padre mio is asleep.' . . . Yet, Londres is nice—much older, nicer than Nueva York. I did not love it till I went there. . . . Perhaps I love Londres best."

"Then—then I, too, love Londres best. Yes, I love Londres best, too."

And he would laugh.

Yet, it was that same London that she feared—and that she both craved and dreaded for their talk. She knew vaguely of a distant cousin, distant in blood as in geography, he had said, in one of the fragments making up her vividly imagination-coloured little patchwork of data. And her heart welled up against her own words that she, too, loved London best; and against that England that had taken Gibraltar, that Gibraltar that seemed, somehow, to paint its shadow of failure across the salt waters all the way up to poor little Cadiz—yes, with England sitting on it, cross-legged like a retired tailor who had pitched his shears over into the Mediterranean! . . . Distant from Methico, yes, but did she seem so distant to him now, this cousin? Was she distant at all? Lola had said his friends were American, but what did Lola know? To Lola, poor little ignorant thing, English and Americans would be even more alike than to herself! . . . She had never disliked America—even on account of her kindless war with Spain . . . stupid as that had been, and how clever of them, too, winning so quickly, and how generous, paying so large a price for Los Filipinos, that had been so great a nuisance to dear Spain so long! While that England, who took everything . . . ! Ah, was she, perhaps, this cousin, the imagined American beauty at whose

loveliness, and at whose companion's, she had been afraid to look—turning coward at the mere intuition of their gold patricianism?

"José," she said suddenly after a long silence in which they had been gazing across to the beautiful remote islands, "having had you in my life, I think I could now die happy if I could be a lady once, only for a night! And for that matter I could ape it, José Luis, so that no lady ever born could find the difference. Let me tell you I am cleverer than you know, my own. For instance, if you would take me to see those ladies whom you know at the Continental, to a dinner or something, you would not be ashamed of me, I assure you!"

He smiled, patting her hand.

"Indeed, it would be feasible, my dear! For instance, you could say that your father had been a friend of my father, a rich gentleman who had to go up to Paris for a week for some transactions on the Bourse, and you having come to him with letters, and he having no near relative to trust, he had left me in your charge, asking you to show me some attentions in his absence. Could anything be more natural—or refined?"

José laughed.

"Ah, you may laugh, José Luis! But I would be in earnest if you gave me the least encouragement. Do you think I cannot look and act the lady?"

Half-smiling, half-defiant, she rose, and a subtly delicate change vaguely defined itself in her whole face and bearing as she began to murmur scarcely audible exclamations at the pretty scenes—turning this way and that, lifting an imaginary *lorgnon*, looking at José Luis, looking through him. And having moved languorously to the balcony rail, she stood with one gloved hand upon it in a posture of complete, apparently unconscious dignity and grace.

"Was it well done, my own?"

"You would be a great actress, Dulce!"

"That is both kind and unkind, José Luis!"

"You know how I intended it, Dulce."

"Yes, yes. And it is just what I have often said, for that matter. Yes, I could be a great actress. Or a great anything else, I feel sometimes. I felt so when I was for three nights in the chorus at the Alcázar. And I have been feeling so again, since—since——" She broke off as she herself blushed; and again they were long silent.

"José Luis——" Her eyes had grown grave and distant, a touch of mist in them.

"Yes, Dulce?"

"I am very thoughtful, for all my chatter and—and happiness. Tell me something, José Luis. What is this thing that—that I have been? What is this wickedness that I have done? That is my trouble—although I say far too many, and make up a lot, I do not know enough words. I am trying to find out words for the wickedness of the Trudge Market, José Luis."

His handsome face grew almost boyish in its troubled thoughtfulness.

"'Traffic' is a word, I suppose, if you can understand it, Dulce."

"'Traffic,' yes. I can understand that. But in what? That is not fully it, José Luis."

His voice was quite low as after a hesitant pause he answered: "I suppose it is traffic in God, Dulce."

"Ah!" she cried, circling his arm in her hands with a little shiver. "'Traffic in God'! What terrible words, José Luis! Now it is my turn to say, what terrible words!"

CHAPTER VII

THE TIME GOD TOOK

IN his long absences, at first full of happy wonder for her, wonder that gave her bliss-filled solitudes, she dreamed, laughed, sang, sewed, renewed and re-renewed the room, shifting its furniture, changing its colours, its flowers, its perfumes. By now, her habit of speech had so grown upon her that she talked to him whether he was there or not.

"My own, do you like that? Yes, you do, my silent one. So why not say so? Because perhaps you are talking to someone else, on whose soul may purgatory sit forever like a hen on a china egg. Come soon, my own!"

And again: "My own . . . my own!" What an expression it is! . . . I wish I had ten small my owns—and that you had ten, José, making I suppose twenty my owns—only I never could do any sum except subtraction! I do not wish it really, I would be so ugly, but I would so like to name ten Methico and Nueva York and Gardenia and Royala and Vera Cruz and Silver Mine, and the other ten Re-hee-nald and Pair-thee-val and Ruby and Vi-i-olet and Day-zee and Zo-ee. And one, the most darling of all our my owns, if she was very, very homely I would name Gwen-do-l, y, n, lean, Gwendolean; and if she was very, very beautiful, like you and me, I would name her Ja-a-ane! Would not that be clever?"

And she became so fond of this thought that she began talking also to Jane and Gwendolyn, and even mentioned her to José Luis when he was really there.

"It rained while you were out—a long Gwendolean

morning, my own! But now the sun is out, instead of you! Only look—what a Jane afternoon!”

And she named the sharply-cut sun and shadow halves of the bull-ring Jane and Gwendolyn.

When the hours turned more than usually idle, and idleness itself grew unamusing, she would herself wander forth. To-day she had gone down to the statue of Colon at the foot of the Ramblas, wound around past the coal-yards, and climbed Mont Juich, whereon, outside the fortress, she had told a sympathetic sentry a long rambling story about her happiness.

“He is twice as tall as you, amigo! If we ever go to war with Methico, you will all be killed—you, and all your friends! Think of that!”

On passing into the Flores she had been glad—for her own sake but for her little friend’s too—that Lola was not there.

“Poor little thing! I hope she is having lunch to-day, as well as some supper to look to! And I hope she and Jaime will keep their vow to me and get married. They promised they would if anything should happen. Well, much has happened—and nothing could be more sensible!”

On her journey back, down the mountain, she had stopped at the Casa Blanca, a pretty grape-vined inn by the descending wayside, irrelevantly christened white with its four walls plastered as pink as a string of corals, and had drunk their health—and then José’s—in deep draughts of vermouth, gazing off over the still blue waters of the Mediterranean as the high sun fell slowly lower, and marvelling, in a sporadic mood of curious thoughtfulness, at the comparable sweep of her new own existence.

“I . . . as pure and worthy of heaven as a married woman for a whole week! Maria, God and all angels bless thee for picking up this miracle out of a nasty street-brawl! And this is I . . . Dulce. . . . *This* thing, all in the space of seven days! Well, when you stop to think of it, my own, that is the time God took to make the

world. . . . No, more than that time after all, when you *really* think of it, for He made it—actually—in six, and then rested. . . . And there, in the end, my own case does fit, precisely, for so have I! . . . Ah, what divine *rest* there is in love! . . . And He might *unmake* it, too, for that matter. . . . Though I do not believe He could, now the thing is whizzing! It always takes longer to *undo* a thing you have done. . . . If you can undo it at all!"

Then she meandered on down the mountain-side, stealing occasional figs from over the low stone wall for the joy of the crimes, and in repayment, at scrupulous twinges of her conscience, dropping small unexpected coins at the diminutive sordid huts of the garden owners as she passed.

She walked so slowly downward that the *pasear* of the officers and their families overtook her when the fortress yard was closed at five o'clock, and at the base labourers were going already homeward from the coal-yards. She shuddered at the thought of meeting Jaime, and hastened a little.

Farther on, she breathed easily again; and she began striving, suddenly, to analyze a new, strange feeling that she had when out-of-doors. . . . Stumbling suddenly upon its secret, she blushed furiously. It was the queer comfort of walking without looks from side to side . . . of walking, walking without need or purpose . . . without glancing to the right or to the left. . . .

Would he be at home, perhaps? It would be happiness unutterable to come in upon him there, without having to wait, listening. It was still early, though later than he had as yet come home. She humoured her desire, and turned her steps into the long way about, through the wide boulevard out to the New Arena, and back into the heart of the city by way of the long tree-lined Gran Via. The slow creep of coming darkness jumped forward with a sudden bound. Lights came from the wine shops. A star shone out over the blackened fortress. [Tingling

with the glow of excitement in her small adventure she went on and on—and on—as she had so many endless times gone on and on, yet with this exquisite miracle of difference that lit her heart, lit the Gran Via—on past the dark Arena, on and on. . . .

Soft candle-light gleamed from under the door and the lit heart bounded with rapture.

"My own! My own! You are here! Was it long? Was it long?"

"But a little while, Dulce."

He was standing at the window, an elbow propped beside the mignonettes. He reached out his other hand to her, and as she took it in both of hers she saw that he was in evening dress, as on that night seven days—so very long—ago.

Quick, grateful tears jumped into her eyes.

"Well, well, my own, the supper will be worth it!"

"To-night, I am going out to dinner, Dulce."

She dropped his hand as if it had suddenly burned her. For a moment, the little tragedy overwhelmed her. But she caught herself, driving her nails into her palms, and when she spoke her voice was very steady.

"Very well, dear. I would be wrong to ask otherwise. By myself, I will drink your health. You know that."

He patted her hand, then, as when she had found him, gazed out of window.

She stirred about, setting the table with food and wine. Her quick occasional glances discovered him thoughtful, preoccupied. At last she sat down on the bed.

"José Luis, only what you give me can be mine. Six days ago I said to you: 'I will ask nothing, or if I ask, answer so little as you choose. In a few short hours, you have given me happiness to fill a lifetime. You know what I have been. You can owe me nothing.' All that I said, and by all that I will abide. But I am going to tell you this about myself, my caballero. Why at this time, I do not know, except that I feel all at once very lonely and frightened. Will you look me in the eyes, José Luis, as

on that night a week ago, when I first asked you to? Thank you, my own! It is this, Caballero: What I have been, through you *I am not*. And I never will be again. Never. After you leave me, if I should live through that, then never, never, never again. I have taken that vow. And I will keep it. I have wished for you to know that, José Luis."

His eyes faltered before hers and they looked away from each other.

"I—I am going to ask you something, José Luis. I remember what I said. Answer me or not, as you choose. The ladies who drove by the Royal that night—you dine with them?"

"Yes, Dulce."

"The young one, you have told me, is pretty. Your father was almost American, José Luis. Do you like American good-looks?"

"Sometimes, Dulce."

After a long silence she slipped from the bed, and having gone across to him, spoke over his shoulder. Her voice had an unaccustomed sound—a strained new effort in it.

"José Luis—my—my own, once more, answer me or not, as you choose. Only, be kind now instead of later. Do you marry her, José Luis?"

"Possibly, Dulce."

He did not turn, and for a long time she stood silent behind him, steadying her body and her voice.

"You are going to England. But on the way, when you should leave here, you were to go to Paris. When do you go to Paris, José Luis?"

"To-morrow, Dulce."

CHAPTER VIII

"HER STEPS TAKE HOLD ON HELL"

THE clock ticked between them in the quiet room, only its maddening *click, click* answering her low moaning, which came, like the reflex of a twitching nerve, less and less often from the bed.

At last, with desperate hands wiping an imaginary weight from his temples, he rose and stood over her.

"Dulce, you will forget me presently. Sooner, I think, than I will forget you."

"Damn you, may you burn in hell for that!"

They were her first words, and she flashed upright with them, her nails biting the bedclothes, her face blazing at him from where she sat with her knees touching his.

"*Dulce!*"

"I mean it! There is a case for *my* right, and I mean it! Shall I sit here like a speechless animal and let you stamp with such words on such a love as the Virgin never let live before while I have lungs to scream with that you lie?"

"Dulce," he cried, his hands at his temples again, "you make me feel like a coward, a criminal, a beast!"

"Saint or man or beast, you are what my soul eats and drinks!" She pushed him away, sweeping him so roughly with her hands that he fell more than sank upon a chair, and clenching tight her fingers, like a thing in a cage she paced through and through the room.

"For the love of Christ, feed me a little longer! You are rich and idle, you have no work to do, you have no family here to hurt or shame. Unless, indeed, that woman is your cousin! Oh, you need not start, with either sur-

prise or anger, for I have put two and two together—making one! And if she is not, they must, in truth, be American *savages*, deserving no fine points of etiquette, or would they travel with you? For you need not tell me they go with you to Paris—I know it! Would any *Spanish—lady*? But I—I ask nothing! I do not *wish* to know! And if I did I would not ask! I stay, you see, within my boundary, even as you knife me! A *Spanish* woman *stays* where she belongs! Oh, José, José, lie to those women, lie to them! You have lied to them already—lie again! You admitted to me you were afraid they might hear of your being with someone at the bullfight, which they were too nice to go to—the only reason you ever took *me*!—so you told them of it. What did you say to them of *that*? Tell me what you said to them! It concerns me and I have a *right* to ask!"

"Something, Dulce, such as you suggested to me the other day. That your father was a friend of my father. That he asked me to attend you while he was away."

"Tell them that again! Say you must stay here for a few days yet! José, José! My life goes with you on that train to Paris!"

"Dulce, I must not! Even if I could, it would be wrong. You——"

"Wrong? Dio mio, I could put back my head and laugh at that!"

"I know, Dulce, I know! Only your nature and your sweetness to me keep you from saying, 'Why not right and wrong a week ago?' But I, too, have learned something in a week. Dulce, let me tell you, if I can, what I have learned to feel. You have said yourself, plain speech is only right between you and me. Try to understand—as you have asked of me. Dulce, 'this thing you are,' as you yourself have called it——"

She halted her mad pacing for an instant.

"'Are'? How dare you? Am I a *liar* with the rest of it?"

He flushed crimson.

"Dulce, this thing you *were*—that, poor little girl, you do not understand. It——"

"I *do* understand!" She flung it back at him across her shoulder, for she was tramping again, with desperate eyes that did not look at him.

"I do not think you do. There is a thing, Dulce, called '*Society*.' Heaven knows my part in it has been poorly borne. A man's usually is, I suppose, compared with a woman's—in—things like this. I suppose that is why there is such a thing as 'what you—were.' But while such things must be—or are—Dulce, they should have nothing to do with such—such love as you show for me. It is too—too terrible, Dulce!"

Once more her voice flew at him over her shoulder, stinging.

"So it is your turn at 'terrible' again, is it? Well, have you finished, priest?"

"Dulce!" he pleaded. "Dulce!"

"For if you have, I have this much to say: I know all that you have just read out, and more."

"Then, am I not right, Dulce?"

"No!" She turned, the word a shout, the hungry eyes blazing, her whole face quivering. He drew back further on his chair, involuntarily, as beneath a blow, and from the surge and beat of her prowling passion that had grown to a thudding pound upon his senses, he was freed only to pale under the words that came first bitten from her lips, then thrown forth in a scattering torrent.

"Right? Holy God! Right? The very Virgin you think of is laughing at you! If anything in God's universe can wipe out and do away, like a dry rag does spilt water, that thing is such a love—such a love as *my* love, do you hear, you who talk right and wrong? I knew my happiness must end. I knew I was only one kind of thing in what you call Society, I knew, as soon as I could think at all after I met you and loved you, that I had been something worse than I had ever dreamed I was, I knew that if I chose to be worthy of that love and

true to it, which I swore and swear still I will be for ever and ever, I must not only be decent after you left me, but that I must try to pay back into that immaculate 'Society' for what I had done and done that was *indecent*. How, God knows, but I knew that I must, or else go down into the gutter again a thousand times deeper as to my soul than before because I would know what I was doing. Yet with all that new understanding, which I suppose God expects me to *thank* Him for, I could *not* know that you would leave me in a week! I thought I could pile, and stack, and stack up my happiness till I had enough to see me through when the death-bell rang! But now——"

She paced again, her clenched hands striking at her sides and at his brain.

"Did you think of *my* side when you said 'Society'? Do you know what it means to walk, and walk, and walk to earn your bread as I earned mine? Can you think what it will mean to give up that hellish trudge, trudge, trudge, to earn it some other way? Trudge yourself for a while, and when you meet God, see if you want Him to leave you!"

"Dulce!" his voice begged her. "Dulce!"

"Oh," she laughed, "only a fool would ask a man to think! He comes to market, and pays, and goes, and is done with it. And if you give him more than he bargained for, is he grateful? No! He thinks only of the *embarrassment* of his riches! I know how a man's mind works! *You* helped to teach me! 'Dulce, you make me feel a beast, a coward!' Did I call you so? In your memory you will put the words in my mouth, you will think I said them. You blame me even for your own emotions! So God knows I can scarcely expect you to let *me* have any! But who made them grow to the size they are? I will not say you roused them—you could not help that. But knowing them, you fed them! Why did you stay? I told you to go—I told you how I felt! You said you *wanted* to stay! Moreover, it was

no market matter, you with your piled-up basket on your arm! No money soiled it! You respected *that* decency—you did not offer me any. You knew that I would strike you if you did!"

She stood suddenly over him with one clenched shaking hand upraised.

"Were you going to? Were you going to before you left? Shall I strike you now?"

"Dulce! Dulce!" his voice again besought her. "All that you say is right, horribly right! It is what I tried to make you understand! I am going so that I shall do you no *more* harm! I have been wrong from the beginning, quite, quite wrong!"

"Oh, priest, priest!" she cried, and again her animal tread thumped through the room. "Have you no words to your name but right and wrong? Be a man, José! Be at least a man, and make a man's answer—that boughten women must pay in some coin or other! They must, but is it fair, is it fair when women are not born equal, when some are born free and some are not? What chance have I had, tell me that? Perhaps over in your strange America girls can stay good, poor or not, and stay out of the convents into the bargain. But here, what chance was there for a girl like me? My God but we were poor, I tell you, and my mother and father were good, and proud too—and at my expense, for God in His goodness to me saw fit to make me not only a girl, but a girl with an elder sister. Do you have our customs in Methico, or are you too near to the free States? With all the money gone to marry my sister, for me, let me tell you, it was dry up in a convent or stay alive in the streets, and even now I would not choose the other if I could start again! In a convent, could I have loved you—or *any*—one? A priest perhaps, and a hypocrite in a smeared white robe I would never be! So soon as now, I tell you I would have been a snarling, bitter thing, crossing myself at Protestants and hating myself and the God whose uniform I wore. . . . And what has the other Gran Via

been, tell me that? Or shall I tell you? *You* do not know! How could *you* know the chewing agony of walking, walking, walking, day and night, for bread that was hacked off my body? Trudge, trudge, trudge—holy God, the hundreds of miles that I have trudged! And what do I face now when you shall go, denying me the short little joy that you could give me? *Do* you know? *Have* you ever thought? Women are not *quite* the same as men, remember! Have you thought of the habitual *need* created in this stalking corpse of mine that I am going to deny from the moment you go because you came into my life and purified me? Look at that need and think of it! Look at the torture, while she hunts other work, of the woman who has given herself, again and again and again and again and again, without her soul's sanction—given and given and given her body, with a laugh perhaps, never with love or a tear!"

She stopped before him, dry-eyed, ravenous.

"Think of that, you who cast me out so hideously soon, and stay a *little* longer! Think of all that, think of my vow, think of the love you taught me, think of the market where I have spent my life, think of the men, like you, who have come to buy, think of the thing the transactions built me into, think of the teeth I must grit to be anything else, think of the weeks of work instead of walk, of the years on end of scrub instead of trudge, think of my sunlight when you let me think you cared, think of my nightmare when I see you go, and stay with me a little while, my own—my own, my life, my saint, my vision of God—a little while, a little, little while!"

The taut wire of her rigid body gave way and she fell between his knees, sinking her head on arms that clutched his coat.

His face was very white, his voice unsteady.

"Dulce, my sweet, I must go to-morrow!"

"Dio, Dio!" she sobbed, tears aiding her at last. "But"—and she looked up at him with imploring face—

"you will come back to-night? You intend that, José Luis? Swear to me—*swear* to me!"

"I swear that I intend to come to-night!"

"You *will* come, in the name of God?"

"I *will* come."

"Thank God for so much!" She sat back from him, propped by her hands on the floor, her eyes closed.

"Thank God! Thank God!"

She repeated it over and over, not opening her eyes as he kissed her swiftly, or as he left the room.

CHAPTER IX

INMACULADA NOCHE

SHE forced herself to eat and drink. She trembled from the quantity of wine, for the food repelled her and she swallowed little of it. The time stretched frighteningly long before her and she protracted the task of clearing the hated meal away. This done, a slowly formulating thought crystallized itself in her mind and she set slowly, deliberately about another task. Bit by bit she cleaned the room, dusting, sweeping, washing as though she were a drudge in a lodgings, dependent for her pennies on the speckless result of her labour. She polished the windows and her candlesticks of silver—these her one rich goods, other than her Manila shawls—and the cheaper silver of her dressing-table. All trace of food and wine she swept away. She watered her plants of mignonette and washed their little leaves, and later set the pots about the room, fetching out the tender colours of the blooms with near-by candles.

Then she pulled forth her wooden chest and brought its myriad hues upon the middle of the floor, a riotous pile in the soft flickering light.

The *mantones de Manila*, huge shawls wherein the traditions of Spain and the Orient became one warp and woof of glowing tones, she disposed about to the full worth and show of their lustre; one upon the bed, another drooping richly from its foot; two more upon two chairs; a fifth, white superimposed with embroidered roses of magenta and cerise and leaves of flaring greens, upon the floor, that his feet might tread upon it. One, her last, she left aside. A mass of lace and ribbons re-

mained half in, half out, the box. . . . Thanks to God, time had gone more swiftly than she had hoped.

Slowly, very slowly, she undressed, standing at last among her discarded garments and the scattered spoil of lace and ribbons like some fair white great-eyed goddess trapped in some human maze and doubtful of her beauty amid earthly accoutrements, hungrily searching for it in that faulty glass above the dressing-table. . . .

Kneeling, from behind the small white curtains of this equipage she drew out fresh linens, and redressed. Little by little she made her toilet like some unassisted royalty, hunting through the box for things undonned the whole long week, and standing finally before the glass for the dozenth time as she knotted a rich crimson sash below her waist like a queen of gypsies. Her dark soft hair was newly dressed; she perfumed but did not adorn it. "Strange man! Strange man!" she thought, for he had praised that scent. "I never cared for it—how I love it now!" She took more wine, and in the glow of it, with a thrill of sudden desperate gladness she hummed to herself the refrain of the fatal Apache waltz, as she wound more and more ribbons, yellow, blue, red, green, into her gitana's dress. Finally she put the box away, pushing it far under the bed to hide its harshness from the beautifully coloured room, and reserving three things from it; her *tamboril*—one whose tinkle sounded the true silver praises of the great seat of tambourines, Cadiz; her red-and-yellow-tasseled *castañuelas*, a precious pair, exquisitely toned, from Sevilla; and her dancing-slippers—small, gold-coloured, sole souvenir of her brief starvation in costly, regal Madrid. . . . All these she flung upon the bed, and the last *manton* she flung upon herself—with prelude of that initial toss and swirl from which the fabric settles, deftly urged with fingers and elbows, into its final droop of utter grace.

"Sevilla! He has been never in Sevilla! He does not know the dancing girls there! Dio mio!"

She tossed her slippers back to the floor, stepped into

them, took still more wine, a last hungry glance in her mirror. The unrouged cheeks had begun to glow a little; and she sat down to wait.

It was quite late already. She was passionately regretful, yet thankfully glad, that she had not asked his hour. The agonizing distrust of love told her that he would have been in any case beyond it. It was well not to have asked.

An hour passed. It was late, late. With a sudden glad throb she remembered that the Opera came to-night, opening the Licéo. Perhaps—more than perhaps—they were at the Opera—*Traviata*. To keep her spirits patient she hummed the thrilling, joyous aria. . . . "Ah! Fors e lui . . ." . . . "Holy God, how I could sing that if I had a chance!" And she did sing it a little, there and then, running through it with now a few of the words, and to these—to *one* of them—with a sudden new thought arbitrarily adding a letter, so turning the simple Italian word to a Spanish one dearer to her at this curious little instant than any other in the whole of español, and catalan, and castellano: "Ah! Fors e Luis! . . ."

Another hour. He *must* have gone to the Opera. And now, she could hear the carriages dispersing by in the Rambla. He *must* come soon—for they stopped but a step away, those women, at the Continental. . . . With the lonely sound of the rolling carriage-wheels her misery, struggle with it as she would, rose up once more.

Seven short days! . . . Well, the Campanile had fallen in seven seconds, probably. . . . And anyway, would have done, in six, if God had chosen that He, and not the world He had made, should rest that seventh second! Yes, on a fourteenth of July. . . . She remembered the date, somehow, though without a year to it—perhaps because it was Bastille Day, for the Bastille, though in another century, had fallen on July the fourteenth, as ugly a thing as the Campanile was beautiful. So beautiful and ugly things alike must fall. . . . Possibly the Pyramids would fall some day. . . . So why should people

build Pyramids? Seven short days! Seven short days from the date when Ferrer was shot—shot blindfold, too, like Mario on the parapet in *La Tosca*. . . . How daringly she had said: "It always takes longer to undo a thing," as if God Himself had been a mere builder of Pyramids! In but one day longer than He had taken to make it, God had unmade the whole world! . . . Ah, does God never rest—again?

A footfall sounded in the corridor and stifling a mad cry she sprang up and seized the tambourine from the bed. As she ran to the middle of the room the candle-flames flickered on her gypsy costume, kindling its gay colours to iridescent fire, and lighting the deep tones of the heavy mantle to a splendid glow of black and gold and Chinese reds and strange dull yellows as she lifted the tambourine and struck her left hand upon her hip.

"Come in, come in, mi Caballero!"

The door opened and a small boy, "clean-boots" of the Continental, stood blinking at her, an envelope in his hand.

She took it in silence, in nerveless fingers that nearly let it flutter to the floor. The little "clean-boots" went away, closing the door behind him. She was alone again, staring blindly before her.

MY DULCE,—It is better this way. Better for both you and me. Believe that, and forgive me. I could not bear it, neither could you. Without intending it I have done you a great wrong. Forgive me.

José Luis.

For a few moments she stood in the soft light among the wonderful colours. Then God seemed to be mercifully shutting them away, in a vague whirl like a spinning prism, and she crashed down and was motionless across the white silken *manton de Manila* that she had spread for his feet.

BOOK II

THE VOICE OUT OF THE WILDERNESS

CHAPTER X

THE DEVOURERS

DAWN was upon the Mediterranean. It had finished its slow crawl out of the Orient, and was about to walk, like Christ, across the sea.

But Mataró lay in dense darkness still.

Mataró, as far as words mean anything, is a town. But in reality, she is nothing but a dirty old woman, straggling down a hillside with her feet in the water. Her ribs are wide stairs of crumbling stone, protruding through her skin of yellow dirt and leading up across her heart to her shoulders on the hill. And two streets, flung out on either side, one toward France and one toward Barcelona, are her vegetating arms. The one that has clutched out so many years for France has germinated towering chestnut trees, which intermingle above like the nave-lines of a cathedral; the other, lazily stagnating in her own more sterile country, has reared, in far lines of erect branching files, great snake-barked, large-leaved planetas. Her head is a church, half buried in the hillside.

By sunlight, she is like a time-worn beauty, brightened with rouge on her death-bed, for her houses display gay colours through her filth.

But now, her withered loveliness was invisible, for she lay fast asleep, in heaviest dark, just twitching in a few rheumatic muscles as she felt the approach of dawn. Some

of these muscles were fishermen's wives, cooking by candle-light. Still more painful ones, nearer her wet feet, were fishers themselves, dragging up their sails. And, quite close to her heart, upon one of her ribs, was one wide-awake, quivering nerve, vibrating yet stoically calm in its unthinking agony.

It was a nun. Under the one night-light of Mataró, she stood, on one of the steps, with folded arms, her back to the huge arm that pointed at France below its cavernous trees, and gazing, as some starved prisoner might gaze at life, along the other great limb that stretched, among its branches of ghostly sycamore, toward Barcelona. And this nun beneath the light, with those thin, folded arms, sunken-shouldered yet erect in the rigid fall of her worn black habit, without female curves, without any human curves at all, was yet like a curving, deliberate, ominous question-mark written by an atheist below a symbol of Christ.

And the symbol was there, too, directly above her parchment-coloured, wax-faced head. Let into the wall of the little house on the corner, it hung under the lamp in a glass-coloured oaken box—a small figure of Christ on a cross, palely waxen and bleeding dark red wax, suffused about with pink and blue and yellow waxen flowers deader than flowers pressed for love in a book, dead as the face of the nun, whose barren fire flamed only in its black, piercing eyes; so piercing that through the still blacker hour before dawn they saw, stealing swiftly forward between the ghost-like heavy sycamore trunks, a woman's figure.

Vague to the sight, but surely, it came on and on, beneath the gracious, thick planeta leaves, toward the nun, nearer, and nearer, like the stealthy approach of climax through a poem, or the tramp of an actress to the high-light of a dim canvas set.

And when it spied the nun, the one life showing in the sepulchral town, it came directly up to her, and raised its eyes.

"Sister, can I find work here?"

"*Get out!*" said the nun's lips, tightly-moving and red in her yellow face as if they were one of the waxen wounds in the Christ above her head.

"Sister," exclaimed the shivering girl in haste, "I do not come as a pauper to the town! You need not fear it! But I must have work to do! I only ask you, can I get it here?"

"*Get out!*" said the nun. The girl had met her eyes in her hurried fervent speech, and as they watched her from above the thin closed lips now, the girl knew that they were reading her life-work, word by word, through and through, and a quick angry flush came into her white cheeks.

"How do you dare? How do you *dare* to cross yourself at me? You do not know whether I am a Catholic or not!"

"*Get out!*" said the nun. And the shivering figure, after a glance upward at the waxen one that had to hang so still, bent her head resolutely and, through the dark cathedral-like street of silent chestnut-trees, went away.

But the nun suddenly ran after her, and seized her in the dark. Her tight lips moved swiftly now, and her voice shook, in her scared impulse.

"We must not have your sort here. But I will give you a whole loaf of bread, if you will tell me your story!"

Dulce laughed bitterly. "I will tell you—not for bread, which I shall work for—but for the sake of telling, of *telling!*"

"Hush!" whispered the nun, her fingers denting her waxy lips. "Come!" and she dragged her by the wrist back toward the light, and past it down to the edge of a dry river-bed, dotted with pools of a stagnating torrent from the Pyrenees, and across a tottering plank into a scow stranded in the mire. "Sit there! Speak low! Here is your bread! Have you been *very* bad?"

"*Keep your bread!*" whispered Dulce, fiercely. "I will tell you because I promised, and because it will help my

mind, perhaps. Poor thing, I see what *you* are! I am a wretched thing, God knows, but *you*—you are what I feared to be, instead of what I am, and you make me glad in this very hour of my punishment that I chose as I did!”

“Do you dare to insult me?” hissed the whispering nun.

“I dare always to tell the truth!” whispered Dulce. “And I tell you that as you sit opposite me now, I see exactly what I saw and feared and refused to be, in the hour of my choice! God pity me, but you, more!”

“Well, well,” whispered the nun, “I only bargained with you, out of kindness, for your story, so let us not quarrel. Tell me, are you with child?”

“No!” cried Dulce, forgetting to whisper. “I would to God I were!”

“You *are* bad, are you not?” exclaimed the nun, clasping her hands.

“Not in that,” said Dulce calmly. “Wherein I am bad, is in sitting here and telling your sort of my sins. To know me briefly, then, once for all, I have been in the Trudge Market, and you, with your pretty imagination, can understand what that term means. And now I have left it, and left it forever. Thus, you know exactly how bad I have been, and after what manner. But to give you good measure for your kindly loaf of bread, I will tell you what my present badness is, as we sit here this minute. The Trudge Market is a market that sells emotions. But like any other market, the butcher’s, for instance, there are certain worthless goods that are not fit to sell. And my present sin is, that having left the market forever, I yet sit down here with you, and chew at the bones that were thrown behind the counter.”

“You—you are quite horrible,” whispered the breathless nun.

“I am no more horrible than you,” said Dulce. “Those bones are only un-sold emotions, remember. And you do something not so different—you eat your own heart; eat it, and eat it, and eat it.”

"But," hesitated the nun, "I cannot do anything else, for I cannot leave my—my——"

"Mar—Sanctuary," said Dulce.

"Just so," said the nun. "And why did you leave yours?"

"Because I loved one of my customers. And because he, finding it out, and knowing that he therefore could not honestly pay in full, ran away from the bad debt. So I, being responsible for it, ran away from the market."

"Perhaps he will come back again, to pay honestly," said the nun.

Dulce shivered. "Do not say romantic things of that sort, nun!"

"But," whispered the nun, "was his body beautiful?" Her whisper grew hastily lower. "You need not look at me with contempt like that! I only asked because, if it was, his soul might become beautiful too, and fetch him back, to honourably pay!"

"You are romantic, hideously romantic," answered Dulce, "because your life forbids you to know life!" And she shivered again.

Less black, grey, more grey, pearl grey, stepped the dawn across the great sea toward Mataró; and as if to discourage its delicacy, the river-bed was sending up all about them a brownish, ugly mist.

"But," persisted the nun, "it might be! Look! There on the bank is a figure peering at us, trying to define us through the mist! God works miracles—it might be he! Tell me, is the tall fine shape like him?"

"Yes, yes," said Dulce, wearily, and closing her eyes, "it is like him, truly. But that is only because of your ravenous imagination and my ravenous pain."

"Well, it is gone, now, anyway," sighed the nun. "And if it was a miracle of God, perhaps it was one in my behalf, for though I have always kept my thoughts pure, even in my prayers, I yet have prayed often and often that I might see something pretty, or have some pretty thing seek to look at me. And yet, hateful as you

have been to me in the things that you have said, I could still wish that this might have been a miracle for you, for I have never yet heard such a story as you told. Here is your loaf of bread for it. The light is coming. I must go."

"As for saying hateful things to you," cried Dulce angrily, "I have said nothing to you but the truth, and I said that not hating you, but pitying you! Who am I to hate anyone, tell me that, after what I have told you! In our souls, we are both starving creatures, and you offer me a soiled loaf of bread for feeding your mind! All the wickedness that I have said to you is that we are alike, that we are both eaters-of-men, you in your way and I in mine. And now you have made us cannibals in another sense—quarrelling—eating each other!"

"It is light! It is daylight!" cried the frightened nun. "I must not be found talking with a bad woman like you! Take your bread quickly, and get out!"

"I came here seeking something!" cried Dulce passionately. "And what have I? I came seeking work, and failing that, a word—a word of light, no matter how small! And you give me this, and I tell you I will not take it!"

"*Get out!*" screamed the nun, furiously; and as Dulce fled across the plank to the shore, she hurled the loaf after her.

Instinctively, Dulce picked it up to hurl it back. But, quite as instinctively, she shrank from such ugliness, and putting it under her arm she hastened through the crumbling stomach of the town, and again into the shadowed street of chestnut-trees, and away.

CHAPTER XI

SOMETHING TO DO

IT was high noon.

It was beyond Caldetas, where once the Moors held sway, and where they come as ghosts at sundown still, to plague and frighten Spanish Christians—and such French ones, too, as have now crept down around the Pyrenees.

And it was inland, for her way, a white road twisting back of her through a hot yellow valley, was separated by only one line of hills from a sparse desolate village with a name almost as long as its distance from the sea—Viladecabades, which looks straight upon the face of the vast Holy Mountain, that huge grey monster of slate that rises unique and sheer from the maze of foot-hills, upholding the monastery that once upheld the Holy Grail.

Here, where Dulce had trudged, perhaps Parsifal had journeyed; but Dulce, unlearned of legendry and Christian mysteries, did not know that.

Here, too, perhaps had passed Kundry herself, who, dyed crimson in sins, had cursed herself with bloody laughter; but Dulce, for all her similar sin and madness, did not laugh.

She was sitting in the road, against a rock, which felt no harder than a small chunk of bread she was trying to swallow, bitten from a loaf that had been as white as the roadway and was now as dirty. Beyond her, this glaring white dusty road snaked suddenly up a hillside of little cork-trees to a little yellowish church with fantastic Moorish windows; but she gave it no heed, and did not even realize that both the church and she were sitting

almost in the shadow of the Holy Mountain—the only shadow that she noticed was one that she saw suddenly in front of her, and which frightened her almost to her feet, for it lay, black on the white road, in the form of some human monster, with big horns.

“Do you need help, girl?”

Dulce gasped with relief at the kind voice and the figure it came from, whose poor Spanish and wide-winged linen headgear showed her to be a French sister instead of a gargoyle.

“I—want work,” said Dulce, choking from the slowly descending bit of bread. “I had no right to eat that. Oh!” and she cast the bitten loaf from her with a shiver. “Now it will return to me, I suppose, on such dry waters as it came from. But I thought it might fetch me to some work if I could swallow it.”

“I can fetch you as far as the church,” said the French sister, “and there you shall have work, and something clean to eat beforehand. We are just now from France, whence we were driven, and there is scrubbing needed indeed in this country of yours!” They went together through the golden landscape, the sister kindly urging her elbow, and into the yellow church.

And after she had eaten her bread and drunk her goat’s-milk, there proved certainly floors to scrub and walls to scrub, and she fell even more gratefully, greedily upon these, with a queer gladness creeping through her agony of soul. And as the afternoon slipped toward evening, into the soul slipped a rhythmic song of scrubbing. . . . Scrub, scrub, scrub. . . . Thank God, the French demanded cleanliness! . . . Scrub, scrub, scrub. . . .

Bright evening came, and with the benefice of her presence shining on speckless floors and gleaming walls, she let herself stand idle for a moment, gazing through a rounded window at the glory of sundown spread above the foot-hills, preparing the funeral of her first searching day.

"Daughter!"

She turned quickly, surprised at the voice, then more surprised at the human beauty standing, like herself, against the golden halo of sunset. It was a priest, whose hood had fallen back against his cassock, revealing a head whose sunlit splendour thrilled her—and baffled, almost frightened her, for it brought her an ungraspable, fleeting memory. Its lovely face was not young—rather, old beyond its years, and suffused, along with the sunlight, with the spirit of youth. It was bent down a little, to meet her eyes.

"After labour done, rest, my child. And to-night, come to me for confession." At the feared words, she shrank back against the wall.

"Is—is it necessary, father, that I should confess?"

"We gave you work. Consider, should you stay with us unsolved? You told your need. We gave."

His logic chanced with straight weight upon the one possible leverage of her soul.

"Then—then I will come to you. But tell me, father, have—have I not seen you, father, in Sevilla?"

"I am thus far south from France, where Christ is no longer even crucified. I have been never in Sevilla, child."

He was gone, leaving her staring after him. His piteous syllables about France had not caused her wide-eyed seeking look; she was accustomed to her country's austerity toward nations of giddier religious tenor. It was his last words that had renewed the escaping memory which his sunset-haloed beauteous head had stirred as a breeze of Tantalus brevity stirs water surrounded by dark protective trees—renewed it, and confused it. Then as he vanished, she caught the words securely, and held them. "They were my own—I said them to myself last night of—of José Luis: 'He has been never in Sevilla'; God, will I for ever be gouged with little words like that? I was getting out my castañuelas for him! . . . But—that face. . . ."

Her eyes caught the highest glory of the radiating light, the head seemed outlined against it again, and truer, better-lighted recollection came like sunset-glow through the tree-darkness to her.

The day when she had bought those same castanets in Seville, she had gone also to the Hospital of La Caridad and into its little baroque church, for whose walls Murillo, two and a half centuries before, had painted eight of his greatest pictures. No more than she knew that far, far longer ago Kundry may have trudged on some hellish errand a few rods from where she stood in the sunset now, did Dulce know that some of these pictures had been raped Kundry-like away from Spain by Soult, Napoleon's great combination general and picture-dealer, for France, who still loved Murillo's Christs if she no longer cared for Christ Himself. But she did know that as she had entered that second-rate edifice of first-rate Brotherhood, the Young John the Baptist, holding the Infant Saviour, and glowing as exquisitely on that Hermanidad wall as the space of sunlit window with the priest's head against it had glowed here now, was the first great Murillo that she had ever seen, in its actual body, except the wonderful Saint Catharine at home in Cadiz. Yet if not in actual body, one other great Murillo, at least one, in its active, very active soul, she had known, and not only in Cadiz, but *literally* "at home" in Cadiz; known, and loved, as she had happened to know, and had not happened to love, the *people* in that home—of which, both picture and people, she had been, as it chanced, reminded with a life-lasting mark that very same night afterward in that very same Sevilla, while she was dancing in the street. . . . She had never known the name of it, nor bothered to think about what land its original had been stolen to, but it was the master's overmastering "Saint Francis of Padua," too with a baby Christ, and with near-by cherub-held Saint John Lilies, and a nearly as near-by cloud of light-germinated cherubs. Perhaps even the clumsy colours of the copy had held no distemper

for her early in her knowledge of it. Yet it was very early too that through its chromo-screach she had heard the undertone song of its soul, and learned for Murillo a child-love that was family with the Murillo wide-world love, yet partook too of unconscious perception that would afterward consciously found and justify a buckling, octave-esque and poignant love from instinctive art-sympathy, and from brain . . . love understanding people, and ignorant feeling, love understanding æsthetics, and their fight with arithmetic.

Buckling now, memory swiftly bringing from Seville to far Cadiz flashed fully to her that the hitch of this priest to Sevilla was not the young John Baptist, that "joy of all mothers" world-radiating along with its nickname from the little Caridad, but was simply Murillo, the Murillo of eternally miraculous *vaporoso*, the *vaporoso* of those Caridad walls, of this sunset on these walls here and now, of a great genius's latterly years wherein an unearthly glow came through him to earth—and particularly, peculiarly, the Murillo of that Paduan Saint Francis.

This priest's had been *that* same beautiful bent face, very slightly bending, as if over that responsive, caressing roly-poly Jesus, against the same soft, "*vaporoso*," yet here brighter light.

And at this dead memory resurrected into this living picture, all fear of confession to this man vanished from her soul.

For there seemed kindness in him; and kindness is the sweetest of all medicines: one good to take from any hand, even if one desires it from one only.

CHAPTER XII

THE WHEEL

YET in the black night that came with little catches of wind through the fantasy of the Moorish window of his cell, flickered in by a single candle's light, his face was less like the tender, sweet Murillo. Its age prevailed upon its youth; the eye-sockets harmed the exquisite contour of the cheeks; and she faltered as the great eyes looked up at her across his bare small table. He opened his lips to speak, but her own prevented.

"Father, before my confession to the Church, if I must make it, will you not talk to me, a little, as a friend?"

"My child, I must be no one's friend save as a priest! Consider! Do you know nothing of the magnificent austerity of priesthood?"

"Oh," she cried, tremblingly, her hands lifting a little toward him as if their muscles alone, and not her wish, impelled them, and a little catch in her voice from a sense of disappointment that would have been small to her in converse yesterday with any being but one, but that was great and bitter in her weary weakness now, "if I did not know of it, I think I begin to know! Indeed, I think I understand you better than you did me! Then, as my friend a priest, will you not let me tell you of myself, not in confession, but just—*so*—and then help me if you can? Father," and she hastened her words on to stop his stopping them, "my life has been a street life, full of evil again and again, by which I earned my bread. But, my last such sin I do not repent of—and I should mention I took no bread from it, by the way. It fetched me from the other, and say as you will, God sent it to me. It

taught me all I know, and I know this: I must pay back in some way, into the world—into Things, if you can understand me—for what I have done. Oh, the thought is horrible—no, I must not say that!—but anyway, terrible!”

He was watching her mysteriously, intensely, with his inscrutable brilliant eyes. In his calm, high degree of concentration, wherein he sat totally motionless, he had changed again. His youth had returned to him, the glitter of the studying eyes dispelling the gloom of their sockets and making the contours of the face once more so lovely that he should have been painted for a church. But even so he was not the Murillo. He might have been an angel now; but never more for the hungry girl before him that thing of *vaporoso*, the tender young Paduan Francis. His was a brooding spirit, one of fire quiet and white-hot. And this, vivid against blackness; and yet, from France though he might be, or from wherever, Rome itself, Limbo, mere, sheer Christendom, still this something else that he seemed to her was something else Spanish—Spanish despite its dominant tone was black, pervasive black, its only colours the amalgamate fierce essence of colours, white. Those golden vapours of Murillo, she had learnt further by heart, after Seville, in her brief, high-lit, hungry sojourn in Madrid, where she had had more art to eat than bread; and the Museo del Prado had shown her other things than the sunlight of Spanish paint, and again her mind in its hour's odd mode was putting out tentacles. But she was listening.

“As your friend a priest, in friendly priestly reply to what you have volunteered to me, I will tell you one all-important thing. There is one all-powerful way to repay all sin: the Church, my child.”

She shivered, unaware of shivering, and thinking herself quite calm, like himself, and as were her words, for the tense quiet of the beautiful spirit before her had relent her confidence.

“That is no way for me, father. And before I can

know what way, I must more fully understand myself. And there, you can help me somewhat, if you will. There is something in the Bible, a particular something, that I would like you to read out to me. Is that a Bible, father?"

And she pointed to a great, aged book upon his table.

"It is a testament, the old, in an abandoned language, the Vulgate."

"I think I can find it there, and you could translate for me."

She had already drawn the big volume toward her, but his voice in one word, and his right hand in one gesture, drove her in an electrical terror back from it.

"*Slowly!*"

Resonant, loud and clear, it had come from the young stately man like the stroke of a great bell in an alarm-clang; the gesture with which the white hand had briefly cleaved the air toward her had held indeed all the austere magnitude of priesthood. White and black, as if he were cameo made of flesh and velvet, and flickered over by the golden candle-fire, he was like a pure demon, some creature from before the throne of God, infused by divine purpose with the right of wrath. She had shrunk away gradual step by gradual step into the very doorway, where she stood with wide staring eyes gazing at the phenomenon of him.

"You show a strange, bold spirit, girl!"

"Yes, that—that is I, exactly!" she succeeded in whispering; but he froze her to silence with his own silence, and his eyes.

"From words chosen by yourself, you come to me a penitent, I think—one to be led, not one to lead! Then shall you reach out for my book, and point out to me what to do for you? Answer me this: you say with a prompt metal assurance that the convent is no way for you; how do you know that it is not a way? How do you know that it is not *the* way—the *only* way?"

Her voice was still husky under the spell of his fierce authority, but again she succeeded in using it.

"I—I know myself," she said.

"You have just told me that what you needed was fuller understanding of yourself!"

Despite his hot logic she felt a shade of injustice in the swift words, and her voice grew momentarily stronger.

"To that extent, *indeed* I know myself! To that extent I have *always* known! And if you wish to more understand me than just my word, all that I have felt about convents was proven to me at dawn to-day, when I asked a nun at Mataró for work and after reviling me she talked to me in the river-bed, bargaining with me for all the wickedness of my story. I knew then that I had been *right* when as a child I chose the sunlight of the streets instead, for it was horrible, *she* was horrible!"

He rose, tall, slight, straight, like a glittering arrow pointing heavenward, though his arm and slender hand and trembling forefinger were directed forthright toward herself, and her heart seemed to sink, and stop, and freeze, as if these were a weapon.

"A holy nun, of the Church, horrible? Take care! Shall *you* dare say so, you, a scarlet woman?"

Yet she dared to stammer:

"Is every human being in the Church good, not only in the body but in the mind?"

She trembled in his wonderful presence as she asked it, but his eyes were justly searching hers and he received it with dispassion.

"If she seemed evil to you it was the devil in your own soul painted her!"

There was a sob in the full voice with which she suddenly cried out:

"Oh! Oh! The devil is *not* in my soul!"

"*Girl, who are you to know?*"

The resounding belfry-tone with which he had cried back his reply made her sway in the doorway, and reverted her to the entire possession by fear that had sent her

tottering back from the testament at his first command to her.

"You who decry a sacred woman of life-sacrifice to God's work, you who say that her way is not one for you, which indeed it is not for any woman of determined sin, tell you me this: Are you, or have you ever been, or pretended to be, a Christian? The word 'Catholic' I do not use, for there is but one Christian in the world—the Catholic!"

With a little moan of desperate confusion, she opened the eyes that she had closed in the blaze of his look, and met his, with face quivering, through a silent moment in which she sought to plumb her mind and soul for the truth.

"I—do not know," she said. "I think I *was* a Christian, when I was a child. Anyway, I was born a Catholic. But though I supposed I still was, can I have been a—a Christian all those years I was committing that sin? Is such a combination possible? *Who am I indeed that I should know?* And as for now, when I am sinful no longer—for I have stopped, forever, oh, forever, I assure you!—I *still* do not know, for where I used to believe everything, sins or no sins, now there are some things I do not believe! At this moment I cannot tell you what they are, for my mind is sickly. But one, for a great instance, I can tell you—I do not believe in hell. No, except as it sits around us here on earth, where I have lived in it. Yes, the more I think about *God*, the *less* I believe in it, and except for the rest that I may have to trudge through here, I do not believe that there is any more!"

"Daring soul," he cried, and his words were vibrant with something almost like pain in the richness of his exhortation, "beware that if God does not hear your every word because of His infinitude of businesses, I, His representative, do! Beware! As such representative I declare to you there is hell, and from my whole conviction as a studied man, I charge you as you look me in the eyes to learn from me now that if there is any hell for

any human beings, *for fallen-away Catholics* there is a special and a double hell—doubly deep, doubly isolate, of lakes of doubly potent flame wherein to the seared and wrenched soul eternal damnation seems doubly infinite!" His finger pointed at her again and her body twisted in the doorway as if its white heat had touched her. "And such, a Catholic fallen away, you boldly dare to state yourself to be!"

"These—are words," she gasped, seeking wildly within herself for strength though terror had suffused her eyes beyond her power to wipe away. "You speak them and believe them, but my soul does not tell me that they are true!"

"Wretched soul!" rang his voice loudly and awfully. "What should or can it know to tell you that would surmount the knowledge and the word of God the Christ? I do not condemn you, for His Church forbids me; but with all my authority I repeat: Beware! Who are you to know that in rejecting the cloister as the way, at smallest *a* way, for the retracing of your crimson path, you do not commit a sin worse than any, yes, worse than the total all, of all your sins?"

Shaken throughout and all over by the spiritual frightfulness of the thought, she stepped a pace toward him, as if her uncontrolled body were starting to fall, or herself were drawn inevitably forward by the power of his majestic beauty and the command of his overmastering righteousness. And aware of the fierce potency of such fear as had swept her at his dread suggestion, she gave a low helpless little moan, a little sobbing childish outcry, and bending her head between crouched shoulders covered her face with her hands away from the vivid sight of him.

"I warn you," his voice tolled swiftly on, with the seeming outcome, to her mental and physical senses, of harder and harder metals stricken together, "in dedication to the Church and her service lies a sinner's safety: so much is definite truth, indubitable. You have asked help; I will help you to a cloister. Whereas otherwise,

what know we of your end that has no end? Choose! For pictures of your precipice, within this cell where now you stand is the Truth, the Inner Light—I represent it; outside, where you have trod and desire still to tread, beyond these doorways, is the desolation of abomination like to the black thick night to be seen there through that window—the Outer Darkness. Choose! For within lies a way infallibly right, while take again the path without, and how do you know, who are you and who am even I to know, that your refusal of God's proffer now, or the mere very thought before the word of your denial of hell, *may not be not alone the deepest yet of all your sins, but indeed the one unforgivable sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost?*"

At the stroke of it, like that of an iron bar upon a bone, her bent frame shook as if the little waves of terror that rushed through her soul were actualized into physical ones that surged over her body, and a scream came into her throat, and the first sound of it escaped her.

But she cut it short as if with a knife at her neck, perhaps in fear of herself hearing it. Dropping her hands from the whitened terror of her face she saw again, and at its high utmost, the seeming miracle of his exquisite illuminated figure. And even right here, her abrupt brain reached out and one of its tentacles touched that other matter of the Prado: Murillo? For all its cameo classicism, pure Greek or pure Modern, the vision before her was to her hallucinating mind a thing risen from some witches' broth of the black art of Goya—the necromantic spirit-flame of a demoniac Sabbath soup.

With stark features, staring-eyed and open-lipped, she met his beautiful blazing eyes again, for one hideous instant. Then, with another little low helpless cry she turned and rushed out of the cell.

CHAPTER XIII

THE UNTYING OF THE ROPE

IT was evening, near some poppy-fields. Once more, evening, as she struggled toward these pretty fields across a little white bridge. She did not know that they were poppies; she knew only that beyond them a hill, green as a jewel or an Irish farm, held high in air a little town, and she was wondering if she could reach it, even on her hands and knees. But when she came beside the fields in the growing twilight, she halted there, held by a sense of mingled fertility and peace that crept to her from the long ranks of red and yellow fading with the dusk, as if the drowsing flowers were a group of quiet, understanding friends, going to sleep together for the night. She wished she were their friend, and might sleep with them.

"Friend, are you a stranger in this town? You look very tired!"

The woman who met her timid gaze seemed to be reading all of her pain and weariness, and none whatever of her sin. Her voice had been soft and sweet, yet with a queer ring, like the touch of metal or the poignant seep of a bird's tone. Dulce stood spellbound, unable to answer her, and the woman took her arm without further waiting and led her up the steep highway to a small house poised over the valley. Within, she lighted candles and set forth supper while Dulce, sunk upon a chair, wept hot, slow tears that she could not seem to quell. Looking about at last, she saw in one corner a great wire cage, and hopping about the floor and bed and fluttering about the woman, numerous little green birds—trained birds, Dulce thought. They ate, from the woman's hand, while

she and Dulce ate, the girl in silence, the woman talking softly of the little town, which God, she said, had wonderfully blessed—with a wonderful priest, who was good to Christian, beast and pagan; with pretty, happy citizens, who were kind to strangers; and with industry, which made it well-to-do, and happy.

"And you, little friend? You are a wanderer? You seek a home, perhaps?"

"Yes," said Dulce, "I am a wanderer. But what I seek is work. *Any* work that is not the work I did, which was—the one unforgivable sin." She flushed in saying it to this woman's ears. "If not," she added, paling hard upon the flush, "the sin itself against the Holy Ghost."

"Of that, dear," said the woman, "either the sin you meant or that nameless one, you must not talk, or even think, until you are rested, and your mind is straight. That is the one great way for minds as weary as yours—to think of the future, not of the past."

Tears sprang to Dulce's eyes again. "The prettiest word in our whole Spanish tongue scarcely describes you—*Mi Dio*, but you are *Simpatica*!"

"That happens to be my name, dear," said the woman, smiling.

"Well, well, but I have always believed in words!" exclaimed Dulce. "And I am sure that when I can tell you of myself, you will be able to help me in what, beyond work, I am hunting for. Can I find work, and then lodging, here?"

"Naturally, for the present, you will stay with me. And *your* name, dear?"

"Dulce."

"And you deserve it, Dulce," said the woman, softly. "To-morrow, you shall talk to me if you choose, but certainly to our priest, the godliest man in Spain. Indeed, I think I hear his footstep now!"

"I am afraid of priests!" cried Dulce, in terror.

"Not this one, dear!" said *Simpatica*, and she ran to the door. "Padre! Oh, Padre!"

"You need me, daughter?" said a sweet kind voice, and the priest entered.

"*She* needs you, Padre! Her name is Dulce."

"A pretty name, a pretty face, Simpatica. Look up, my child. No matter what your trouble, you need not be either frightened or ashamed with us."

Forcing her eyes up, Dulce met his gaze, and something seemed to lift from body, mind, and soul; she found herself weeping in the woman's arms, clinging with one small hand to the great firm fingers of the portly priest.

"Give me something to do!" she sobbed. "Something *decent* to do!"

"My child," said the gentle father, "you are very, very tired. But you shall have work to do, when you are able. Your craving for it shows a mind quite right at bottom. Good night, good girl!"

Sleep came upon the little bright birds in their big bright cage. . . . And upon Dulce, in the great, snowy bed, whereby Simpatica stood long looking down at the white, lined, lovely face, which whispered through its troubled dreams, over and over: "Something to do! . . . Something decent, *decent* to do!" . . . And after a time, it came upon Simpatica, beside her . . .

CHAPTER XIV

MANDRÁGORA

SHE dwelt in the village, in the hearth of an old woman whose house was scarce bigger than Dulce, and who gained the few cents' rent by stopping with a larger friend across the green. And day by day—inch by inch, if thoughts have measurements—the “trudge, trudge, trudge” faded in her brain, even the less terrible “scrub, scrub, scrub” ceased its pounding in her turbulent spirit, and the nobler repetition, “work, work, work” began to hum, and gradually to sing, in the sore mind: work in lace-making . . . work in the vineyards, where few women worked—women occasionally, or occasional women . . . work in bottling wine . . . in preserving fruits . . . work, work, work. . . .

First of all, in the bright morning when she had gone forth with Simpatica, she had been allowed to work in the poppy fields, helping the little orphan-boys who grew flowers for market; and here in the sunshine, surrounded by the urgent, serious children, she felt as though the little white bridge in the valley had truly led her into some new world. Before her rose the hill, tall and peaked-looking among its round companions, topped by its pretty village of white and blue and green and pink, like old Cadiz itself, and ribboned from the bottom upward by its twisting yellow highway. It was a fair, fair place in which to work, work, work.

From the beginning, kind peasant eyes and lips smiled at her, the eyes admiring and friendly, the lips calling her prettily by name.

She learned to rest when each day's work was done.

She learned to be familiar. She learned to smile, as she was smiled at. And she learned something else, too.

This was when her voice had been found out, in an unconscious moment of reckless, joyous work. And she soon thereafter learned to sing for the pleasure of the folk . . . and later, for her own pleasure, even . . . for it taught her that the enormous ache at the bottom of her soul thus poured itself forth, forgetting itself while she sang. . . . The vineyarders, going home at evening, would call to her, demanding her music for the early night, on the green . . . that pretty, lovely green, where, though the out-of-doors was certainly bigger than the out-of-doors of crowded Seville, somehow, too, it seemed easier to sing prettily in—as if, perhaps, the Murillo-like golden *vaporoso* that hung over this little hill-town and gilded the air all the way between it and the distantly perceptible Pyrenees, made that air a softer, more gracious piece of paper to write sounds upon. . . .

And at last, one late afternoon, with the roughly-gentle praising peasant voices lingering in her ears, she went of her own accord to the old priest.

She found him surrounded by his little boys, who having finished their work among the poppies, were come to his house for a lesson in natural history; and as they scampered away at his bidding, leaving her alone with him, her courage wavered, and her face turned white a little.

"Padre," she said hastily, yet sitting, in obedience to his gesture, in his own great chair, "I do not think I should call this confession, though little by little, if you will allow it, I will confess to you. But may I do it in the form of—of just *talking*?"

"My dear," said the portly old father, smiling at her with his kind, grave eyes, "by what other means should true confession be?"

Quick gladness coloured Dulce's cheeks and brightened her dusky eyes.

"Father, will you begin with a favour to me? There

are some verses in the Bible that I read once, long ago. Padre, would you read them to me, now?"

"Yes, my dear. But can you tell me what or where they are?"

"I *think* I can. Anyway, Re Solomon said them in the beginning of a very long talk, and the first one I want mentions a honeycomb."

The priest sought out a large volume, and with a little pucker in his brows turned the leaves slowly. Presently he read:

"My son, attend to my wisdom, and incline thine ear to my prudence. . . . That thou mayest keep thoughts, and thy lips may preserve instruction. Mind not the deceit of a woman. . . . For the lips of a harlot——"

"That is it, that is it!" cried Dulce eagerly. "Only, in the book that had happened my way, it said instead 'strange woman.' Well, both expressions apply equally to me, whether they mean the same thing or not. Make me the favour to read on, Padre!"

"——are like a honeycomb dropping, and her throat is smoother than oil. . . . But her end is bitter as wormwood, and——" The old priest hesitated.

"Go on," said Dulce, as she might have said to a dentist.

"——sharp as a twoedged sword. . . . Her feet go down into death, and her steps go in as far as hell. . . . They walk not by the path of life, and her steps are wandering and unaccountable. . . . Now, therefore, my son——"

"Thank you, Padre, that is enough," said Dulce. "Now, that is myself, as you would easily see if you knew me. The 'strange' or the other, terrible word in *your* book, is perfectly true. And the lips like a honeycomb, and the throat smoother than oil, mean my voice, evidently. Then, it says I have a rather cheerless end, does it not? Then, the 'path of life' is exactly what I always call to myself 'La Gran Via.' But my steps *do* walk it, and the book *I* had did not contradict that. It said

my ways were movable, though, and so they are, for I certainly am a wanderer, and not quite accountable just now, just as it says right here. As for that wormwood at the end, perhaps it can be avoided, if I not only behave myself, as I am trying to do already, but find out *how*, which I am seeking to find out. Religion is not it, nor merely being good. There is something else, and perhaps, when you know me better, you can help me find it."

"You *are* a strange girl!" said the Padre; then bit his lips.

"That is just what I told you," said Dulce, "and you have not hurt my feelings. I am especially strange in regard of my fondness for words, and besides wanting to hear those verses again, so that I can never forget them, I had another purpose in coming to you to-day—about a word. Padre, *Simpatica*, who loves you so dearly, and whom I as dearly love, I may almost say, knows everything about me—everything I had words for. And I suppose you know a lot of it, from her. Well, I am better here—not happier, for there was no happiness to start on. But in this holy little town of yours, with you so gentle and understanding to the little boys and the grown people and everything and everyone, I feel in a way that I have only to-day found a word for. Your poppy-fields put it into my head, I suppose. It is '*mandrágora*.' That has several meanings—good and bad. Well, every word touching me must be both, I guess—for a long time to come, anyway. Now, I am very honest, so I have come to you about it. Will you let me, knowing me for what I am—or was, rather—stay here, working for my keep, of course, but as if I were taking *mandrágora*? The poppy-fields, *Simpatica*, the kind townsfolk, who enjoy my singing, all of these are like a drug to me, that I think will quiet my pain till I can think, and go on hunting. Without going to church, without church confession, may I stay, without any promise to you that I will be a Catholic again—stay, until I see clearly?"

The priest gently took her hand in both of his own great hands.

"My child, I think I understand you partly. Marriage is one preventive of grave sins. The Church is another and a greater one. I will pray that the Church at least will win your heart. Meanwhile, dear child, take your 'mandrágora' to that heart's content! Go wander now, through the poppy-fields. And when you find some new pretty word, come again, my dear!"

The evening sunlight slanted on the quiet fields as at the priest's welcome bidding she wandered through them, and then on into the shade of a great acacia tree beyond, where rich violets grew, thrilling her with memories. "Methican eyce!" she whispered to them in English, bending down to caress them. "You are Methican eyce—my own, my own!"

"Dulce!" The voice was so soft that it startled her more than a loud one would have done. From a group of climbing vineyarders, one had come across to her from the highway.

"Dulce, we are left alone. May I talk to you of your singing?"

He was a youth whose soul, if one Spaniard's soul can love music more than another's, had most completely swayed to the lilting cadences of her in the open air on the village green.

"May I, Dulce?"

"Of course, Gil."

"It is an angel's voice, Dulce!" His own grew low and sudden. "It takes me to heaven, Dulce! I love you!" His swift arm was around her waist even as she shrank back. "I love you! Be my wife, Dulce!"

"Gil! Gil! Let me go! Gil, for God's sake!"

"I cannot, Dulce! Tell me nothing, but that you will be my wife! I have talked to the padre, and to Simpatica. I know all that they know! Nothing matters, Dulce! They bid me wait! I cannot wait!"

She was in his arms, her arms tied, powerless. His

bronze face was close over hers, his red lips kissed her mouth. . . . And again. . . . And again.

"Tell me you will be my wife, my own, *my own!*"

She was struggling frantically, helplessly.

"Let me go, Gil! You torture me, torture me!"

"Dulce, my own, tell me you will be my wife!"

"Yes, Gil! Yes, if you will let me go *now!* Yes, if you will come to me to-morrow!"

The scarlet lips kissed her again, passionately, the tight arms released her. She ran wildly to Simpatica's house and burst open the door.

"Simpatica, may I sleep with you to-night?"

"Yes, Dulce, yes! What is the matter, dear?"

"Nothing! Nothing! But I must sleep with you!"

And as on that first night when Simpatica had found her by the poppy-fields, the little birds at last slept in the corner, and Dulce slept. And again Simpatica stood by the bed, looking down at the lovely face, and at the strangely troubled lips, that now murmured through the uneasy sleep: "Dawn, by the Mediterranean. . . . Noon, where nations meet. . . . Night, through a Moorish window. . . . Evening, by the poppy-fields. . . . Trudge. . . . Scrub. . . . Work. . . . For the lips of a strange woman. . . . Her end is . . ."

And later, Simpatica slept herself, beside her. But when she waked, the strange visitor was gone. Nor was she found in her own house, nor anywhere else in the little town.

CHAPTER XV

LA GITANA

"HOYE!"

"Hoye! Hoye!"

"Ho-o-oy-e!" . . . "Ho-o-oy-e!" . . . "Ho-o-oy-e!"

The cry, in wild musical rhythm, calling and answering, quickening, went through the moonlit night, forward and backward across the stirring camp, whose flaring bonfires lighted crags and gulches, wild trees, rough stones. The Pyrenees massed black and desolate against the starry sky toward all points of the compass, yet here in their stony heart dwelt song and laughter, colour of fabric, grace of woman, strength of man, warmth of fire, gracious smell of food and rich taste of wine, with roof of sky as dear as frescoed ceiling, floor of dirt and shard, blanket-strewn, as precious as marble or carpeting; walls of deserted towering rock, dressed with moss and earth and shrub, as fair and familiar as panelled walls of home. It *was* home; changeable night by night, yet very home, after the grave panorama of the day—home with gay company, love, life, laughter, card-games, tears, and children. And at this moment, song.

"Hoye!"

"Hoye!"

"Hoye!" . . . "Ho-o-oy-e!" . . . "Hoye!"

One figure, by a fire set apart in a chosen niche of smoothed flint over the gorge, brewed something hot, all alone. She was childless, or else her children fared nearer the fiery centre. She hummed by herself, content without a husband, or awaiting one. The only figure near her, less shadowy because motionless, was also a woman, seated in silence on a rotting trunk near by.

"Who are you?" asked the gypsy suddenly, in surprise. She had come nearer the silent woman and in a streak of moonlight, seen her face. "I thought you one of us, but are you so?"

The figure made no reply, and the gitana shook her shoulder—good-humouredly enough, and asking: "When did we pick you up, say?"

The taciturn figure still vouchsafed no answer, and when the gypsy had come in front of her, and bending, peered closely at her countenance, a new expression swiftly aged her own ageless face and she muttered queer words, in a rapid cadence, staring the woman keenly in the eyes.

"Now, girl, speak up! Are you alive at all?"

"Yes, yes, I am alive! Holy God, I *am* alive!"

"Follow me."

Stiffly the figure rose and followed her the few steps to the fire.

"Give me your hand, girl—here, close to the light."

She lifted the cold palm and held it, by its wrist, close to the blaze.

"Well, well, what I see there! Behind you—you may well say 'Holy God!' And ahead of you—great name of Egypt, 'Holy God' again!"

A shiver went through the stone of the statue.

"Yet—girl, girl, but there is *esperanza* there!"

"Hope? Hope?" Now a different tremor came through the dead wretch, as though a spring had stirred a paste virgin into motion.

"Yes, girl, written from *ai* to *ah*, with *essay* and *erray* on the way, all made up of little crosses of misery!"

As she spoke the hand was wrenched away between her fingers and the girl recoiled with a low cry: "You have burned me!"

"Well, well, girl, I had to rouse you somehow! Come, we will mend it now, and when all is done, your blood will be coursing. A little pain of body is a sponge for pain of mind!"

She drew her towards her little oblong black tent, a

geometrical blot more sable than the rock itself against the moon-greened and fire-ruddied sky, and leaving her before the breeze-stirred opening, stooped through, and reappeared with rag and oil.

"Hold that!" She poured the oil. "Hold *that!*" She wound the rag. Her voice, without touch of harshness, was yet sharp and short. "Now lift up your arms. Keep them out straight!"

With little throat-sounds of hurt and effort, the girl obeyed, standing like some weird figurine of the rock, flickeringly lit.

"In little," muttered the gitana, "she is like the huge grotesques that crown the Sacred Mountain!"

And leaving her carven thus with the small moan of life in her stone, she went briefly to the fire, to return with a china cup, filled with hot liquid from her iron pot.

"Drink, girl!" And slowly, painfully, the statue drank.

"Can you eat soon, think you?" asked the gypsy.

"I think so," whispered the stone figure.

"That is well. Speech will come after that."

She went about the fire, stirring, preparing, and the girl's figure sank down, steadying itself with its uninjured hand by the tent-flap, and still clinging to this, slowly stretched its limbs.

"Were you sitting on that log before we came?" asked the gitana.

"Yes."

"How long?"

"I do not know."

"You heard and saw us come and pitch the camp, and light the fires, and knowing us for gypsies, neither ran away nor joined us?"

"I thought it was hell, perhaps. I did not know."

"Why hell?" asked the gypsy good-humouredly; but with a prompt purpose of soothing that was spiritually softer than mere good humour.

"Well, I had lately heard quite a lot about hell," said the figurine.

"Well, well, we shall eat soon," said the gitana. She stirred the fire and food again, glancing once and often at the silent girl, who was gradually silent no longer, for in the fire's warmth and the faster creeping of her blood her voice, unsounding first, then a small hum, then actual words, took up the continuing fitful music of the camp:

"Hoye! . . . Hoye! . . . Ho-o-oy-e! . . . Ho-o-oy-e!"

It fled above the settlement sweet and lonely as the moaning laughter of a swooping loon fleeing homeward among the black crags, or from one water to another in their chasm-deeps.

"You were quick to catch that sound!" said the gypsy across her work.

"I can sing like an angel," answered the girl. "A devil or something told me so in the woods the other night. I did not see him, but it was a man-devil. I heard his voice distinctly."

"Well, well, it is quite likely," said the gitana. "Luckily, you are with gypsies now, and devils do not come near us. So you will sleep in peace to-night, at least. Now, let us eat."

They ate from tin bowls, with large spoons, and life came more and more into the girl, and the pain of her numb body grew less and less. The singing had died down, but words and laughter in the camp continued.

"Let us talk," said the gitana, setting aside the bowls. "Come, sit with me near the light and we will try to see the future. Is your hand well? I will not burn you again."

"It is quite well. I am not afraid of you!"

"Ah!" said the gypsy, with a crisp, practical timbre of satisfaction. "That is well, for I tell you you need not be. There are bad gypsies, but are there not some bad folk who stay at home? Though some of the unkind things may be true, there is a lot of nonsense said about

us. Some people do not even like to touch us, of these, a few saying to justify themselves that we do not like to be touched, just because long ago, yes, centuries back, there was in Little Asia a folk of soothsayers, serpent-charmers, called Athinganoi, meaning Touch-Me-Not. But I am no Touch-Me-Not, for I, girl, am of those who know—yes, *know*, if word from father to son and son's daughter to daughter means anything—that our people were, and therefore in soul now are, Egyptians, as all of us, Spanish, French, Bohemian, or what-not, are called in contempt. As for me, I am for generations of the forty thousand Spanish, but before that, I and mine were Egyptian, I say, and Egyptian I proudly enjoy to be called—yes, whether in despising tone or no!”

The proud Egyptian deftly, gently unbound the girl's hand, seated her by the fire, and put an arm supportingly around her waist. At this, the girl looked anxiously into her face.

“Your name is not Simpatica, perhaps?”

“No. Mercedes. Half the girls in Spain are named that, I admit, but with me, it is a proud name, from my line. Still, I am not ashamed of its vulgar meaning of Charities. In our case, there was a purposeful reason; and in any case, they have their place in life.”

“I am fond of words and meanings,” said the girl. “I never thought before of the *name* Mercedes meaning the *word* mercedes. I must remember that. And what were those words you said to me at first—when I was sitting on the log?”

“Hokus-pokus words, girl. They were no spell—more than to make you think so.”

The large anxious eyes grew unhappy, disappointed.

“Then my hand—what you said—Hope—that was false too?”

“No. No, though I suppose I would have said it anyway. We will look further presently. Think, girl! While you have flesh left on you that can hurt when it burns,

there is also hope—no? But there is much written in your hand, too.”

“In your own name, that is true—Mercedes? It is not one of your ‘charities’ to tell me so?”

“It is true. In my own name, I swear it!”

“Thanks! Thanks to Holy God!” And the girl’s head fell to the gypsy’s shoulder. “Friend, friend, I begin to remember!”

She was weeping.

The gypsy held her close, letting her sob quietly, unrestrainedly.

“It is said of us,” she spoke on in a matter-of-fact, soothing voice, “that we were of the seed of Canaan, and that we were scattered all over the earth, and served as slaves of slaves. But again, that is a tale of Asia, while as to us Egyptians, it is said that our wandering was sent upon us because our kind showed no charity to Joseph and Mary when they sought refuge in Egypt. It may be true. It may not. And there lies the purposeful reason of my name—it was in devout pride against that very accusation that my line chose it and favoured it. True or no, we are baptized—the whole generality of us—in the Christian faith. How long, girl, have you been in the mountains?”

“I do not know. Many nights, I think.”

“Without food?”

“Sometimes without.”

“Why?”

“A man asked me to marry him.”

“That is well worth running from sometimes. In *your* case, why?”

“You will not understand me.”

“I will understand you. I am a gypsy. I understand much of you already.”

“I—I am eighteen. Since I was sixteen, I have been bad for money.”

“And will not be again—nor even marry?”

“And *will* not! That is it! That is it!”

"Since how long?"

"I am not sure. Two months, I think."

Into the gitana's eyes came a great light of pity. She made no answer for a moment, but patted her hand, and presently she looked straight and long into her eyes and said:

"Do not forget that word 'hope.' I meant it. Your mind is clearer now. Take it in. I am a visionary, and I see more and more as we sit together here. Of all the words written thus far on your soul, that one leads you farthest. And it is far!"

"Thank God!" cried the trembling girl. "Thank God! I would go mad else! I think that I have been already mad! Was I mad when you found me here on that log to-night?"

"With hunger, child. And with—with pain, sad, sad pain!"

She drew her closer, tenderly, and let one of her brown hands press gently, shieldingly, against the erratically beating heart.

"But," she said, starting, "there is a hard lump there!"

"There is a hard lump inside it," said the girl, bitterly.

"There has been this long while!"

"I do not mean that," said the gitana. "You wear something over it!" And her fingers had begun to tremble.

The girl drew a little away from her, and her own hand, white in the mingling moonlight and firelight, went sharply up against the heart they talked of.

"Ah," she cried, and there was a sobbing ring that was of both ecstasy and anguish in the suddenly passionate voice, "there is the weight of centuries upon it! Indeed, neither am I a Touch-Me-Not, for your fingers have rested upon *the only part of me that has never been bought or sold!*"

"But I tell you I do not *mean* your heart, girl!" cried the gypsy excitedly. "I mean the thing that you love

enough to wear hidden against a heart that loved as yours must love!"

Now it was the girl that started, and she met the eyes of old Egypt with mingled timidity and wonder.

"So do *I* mean that!" she said. "And it is strange enough that your fingers should have trembled like my body itself instantly they felt this matter, for it is one that has to do with Egypt, and old Egypt—yes, if, as you say, word from father to son and son's daughter to daughter means anything, Egypt of at least a thousand years before your line showed charities, or failed to show them, to Joseph and the Virgin!"

"What is your meaning, girl?" And the gypsy's voice trembled now, unconsciously as the brown hands in their instinctive reach toward the girl's bosom. "You will show it me, this thing?"

"Yes," answered the girl, "for you have been good to me—ah, how good!—and besides, this talk of Egypt makes it right—as right as it is strange! For it is almost beyond strange that you should have trembled so instantly at the feel of this, and knowing nothing of it—indeed, perhaps you truly have divination, as you say! Well, believe it or not, I have my family's word, and they were harsh as to matters of truth, take *my* word! I am not of a bad Spanish line, myself, and long ago, there were personages in it. Well, some great Spaniard did a favour to the Egyptian Government—whether it was before or after any reason for hurt feelings over Gibraltar, anyway he did it—some matter of some kind of charities . . . a word again! . . . To repay him, Egypt delayed, in his honour, a festival, till he could get there. It had been hunting, that Government, hunting, hunting for a certain tomb in the catacombs, with the mummy of a Rameses princess in it. She was of the house of Rameses the First, founder of the Nineteenth Dynasty, whatever that means—for I have a clever memory for the little history I have been told, besides this being a special family matter. Well, the opening of the tomb was made in this man's presence,

and it was all exact, and there she was. And *because she had died a virgin*, she had been dedicated to the goddess Astarte, and her mummy wound around with Astarte beads—little beads of turtoise, and of glass, I understand, and of some kind of mud or something. Now, these were given to this specially honoured guest. And later, although he so prized them, indeed, *because he so prized them*, he gave them to a friend who had done *him* some priceless favour. Think what a gift! But, you see, it was for a favour of the *soul*. And by a *third* such gift, it came into my family, and then, to me, skipping my parents, for it was my grandmother said *I* should have it. My grandmother loved me and—and *believed* in me! Well, since—since I have told you I have been bad for money, can you think what this, *this* thing means to *me*—this *part* of me, for the immense meaning of it *makes* it a part of *me*—*the only material part of me that has never been bought or sold?*”

And she fetched something out of her bosom, clutched preciously in one hand, and with the other lifted a cord from around her neck.

As the trembling, almost panting gypsy leaned nearer with uplifted shaking fingers, the girl opened her palm and on it was a diminutive bag, arduously hand-sewn, made of soft, fine balbriggan, and stained with dull brown spots.

“I used to wear them around my neck,” she said, “but they are strung only on a thin thread, and I was afraid for them, and lately made this beautiful little case for them, you see!”

The beautiful little case was part of a man’s under-shirt. The brown spots had once been red.

She opened it, and drew forth the things that for at least three thousand years had been innocent of money.

Fragilely their infinitesimal weight sped them downward and poised them between her finger-tips and the quivering finger-tips of the gypsy, and in the flare of the firelight displayed their intricate beauty of colour, vast

age, and significance. They were little tubular beads. Their whole length was several feet. One would be a half-inch in length, another more, another very, very small indeed. There were perhaps a hundred of them, perhaps eighty: they were so fragmentary, so many were broken, it would have been impossible to count them. Some were of opaque rich glass, some were of pottery, some were of turquoises hollowed out. They were blue, and another blue, and green blue. Though age dwelt seemingly with every one, and mellowness of colour, therefore, dominated their effect, the sheen and splendid glaze-like polish of the glasses and turquoises presented by the fire-flare gave hues of blue accentuated thrillingly: pea-cock-blue, robin's-egg blue, electric blue. Some tones were so deep that only their vivid shine and vitality kept them from nearing lapis; and the greens buried but not hidden in the resplendent tones would have suggested grass, so poignant were they, but that they had a higher, a more brilliant cry. And these colours were set out, and interrupted, and involved by the pottery beads, which were softly dull, and faded, from their likely original intention of conforming with the rest, to delicately sensitive tones of Nile, and of forthright brown.

"They are different in the daytime," said the girl. "In the sunlight, they are both more beautiful, and less. It seems almost like magic. I cannot explain. They simply are different."

"*Life* is magic, and *life* is different day and night," said the gitana. She spoke simply. Yet it was with a little laughing pant that made the girl look startled at her, for suddenly the gypsy seemed old, old, ages old, old even, in her suggestion, as the Astarte beads that had been unwound after centuries and centuries of burial from the varnished earthenware of the virginal Princess Rameses. Gypsy women age quickly; but this one seemed to the gazing girl to have done all of her disproportionate surviving of piled-up time in a few moments. Her face was exquisitely, spiritually ancient as it rose there from

her suddenly conspicuous snowy neck-cloth, with which her fine whiteness of unconsciously shown teeth took part against the darkness, noticeable as the lustre of her black eyes as they met and re-met the dark ones of the girl across the frail blue and green lines of colours, that, so glintingly, delicately pendant between them, were saved from a complete droop downward by her awe-shaken, loving upheld finger-tips.

"Devla! Devla!" she was saying—the odd Romany word for God, repeating it and repeating it again. "Devla! Ah, girl, girl, but this is strangely wonderful! We will see them together in the daylight. But for now, put them by! Their different beauties by sun and moon are not of moment. What is of moment is their meaning to *you*! What I said of hope I may say now again, and ten times over again! How could you ever have lost it, you who can think and feel as you think and feel about a thing like this? What I discerned in your hand I discern now in your *soul*! With the mere possibility of such an emotion as the one you have for this, you will go far, far, Devla knows how far! Where did you get such feelings? *Consecration*—what a vast idea it is!"

"Ah!" ejaculated the girl, starting again. "What an idea, what a *word*! *Consecration*! I never thought of that before. I will think of it always now!"

"But put them by," repeated the gitana, "and then, at once, yes, while I am thus stirred, then for your hand! Smart as we gypsies are at cards, they are not for your sort, and I admit it; and for that matter, we are far more adept at palmistry. Our power in it goes beyond our own knowledge and reasoning! . . . Ah!"

The little cry was at the vanishing of the lovely old colours. The girl's trembling fingers had returned the beads to the little balbriggan bag, the bag to her trembling bosom. Her lips were murmuring almost breathlessly, "*Consecration! Consecration!*"

The gitana took her by the wrist and led her once

more toward the rippling entrance of the sable-black tent and close to the leaping fire.

"This hand of yours is strange, girl!"

"That I know—it fouls everything I touch!"

"The past we both know," said the gitana. "Well, then, the future. . . ." She stood crouch-shouldered, brooding over it. . . . "Strange . . . strange, and . . . terrible. I see with you great crowds of people—vast crowds—throngs—as if, for instance, you were at the bull-ring. . . . But you are not of the crowd—strange, not even *in* it. You are *alone* . . . always strangely, in some terrific way, alone where there are crowds. I was not wrong when I said . . . terrible. I will be truthful. . . . I will tell nothing that I do not see—read out nothing that is not in. . . . These lines . . . all mingling together, they run the world around, and back again . . . home, forever and forever back where you started. . . ."

"Ah, Holy God!" breathed the girl sharply.

"What a gran via! . . . You would never be one of us, or I would say 'Be with us.' Your roving is not of *our* sort. What life is there. *How* terrible! . . . Yet, with it all, hope, hope . . . for you travel the Great Way verily *hand in hand with love*, though always so—*alone*! Just now, in your strange roving, you seek something——"

"Yes!" cried the girl eagerly. "Yes! Yes!"

"What, I cannot read."

"Oh!" cried the girl. It was a little swift moan of disappointment.

"My gypsy mind stops at it. But seek, girl, seek! Never cease seeking——"

"Ah!" It was a sharp ejaculation.

"—— for you find it!"

"A-a-ah!" The girl had cried out again, with a long fluttering breath.

"There it lies in your palm—it cannot escape you. Not if you seek it. It awaits you. You could escape *it*, and your hand would alter. But even so, it would always

await you. It grows up soon, soon, before your eyes, your palm *now* says, like—like a great—a great pyramid—yes, a pyramid like the Great Pyramids of my forefathers' Egypt!"

"Pyramid!" cried the excited girl. "Pyramid! I said they might fall some day! This night, you say—my hand says—one is growing up—for *me*! 'Pyramid'! Again I say, what a word, what a word!"

"Yes," exclaimed the gitana, "and the thing you seek is something both as great and as—simple. It is something that is everywhere about you, and that is in yourself, inside of you! Ah, girl, if your hand but bade me, you should stay with us, and find your bodily peace in gypsy manner—meaning three things, the gypsy Trinity, which is all a gypsy needs: Nature, Nature, Nature, just as a singer's only three needs are Voice, Voice, Voice. But if I turned you from the seeking of your *own* need, bidding your will-power alter your hand, as I, a very gitana, have admitted could be, I should do nothing, *you* should do nothing, but *retard* your fate—*no utmost thing* could go beyond that and *alter* it. And fate—*your* fate—is standing right here with you and me to-night . . . not a bodily presence, yet right here with us, either right yonder against the black rock, or else in there, behind us!" And her arm swept excitedly toward her inky little canvas home. "It makes my vision strong and clear, and I see that pyramid that you seek, and I see you climbing it, watched by seas of people—*deserts* of people. And though I see you climbing to many other great heights, like *mountain* heights, though I see you desolate, terrible, peaked, like the mountains, and among the mountains, against the stars, and as solitary, first, first it is that pyramid that you must seek and find. Perhaps it does not exist yet. When you have learned its nature, from your own soul, you may have to *build* it! Hope, and strength when strength returns to you, will enable you! It is well that your gran via led you here, like the vagrants rumour accuses us of joining unto ourselves whenever we can to

aggrandize our numbers. To-night, you shall sleep with me—deeply, and close to me, as if you were lately young, and I your mother. From clean mind to clean mind there is a medicine in the touch of flesh and flesh. And while your hand bids, stay with us. But your own way lies in cities. That pyramid of yours is no out-of-doors gypsy thing. We are journeying down to the Sierra Nevada. You shall leave us at the first great city on the way.”

“I thank you, and I thank God,” cried Dulce, “for whatever little time I may stay with you!”

“A little time indeed, girl,” said the gitana, “for the first great city calls you, and to-morrow we move on toward Barcelona.”

CHAPTER XVI

PLAZA DE TOROS

A WOMAN sat at the bull-ring, alone in the crowd. It was in the Neuva Plaza, the New Place of Bulls, in the suburb Hostafranchs, the big circus of red brick crowning its little hill so prettily feathered with green young locusts—and within, all Barcelona that could mass into space for some seventeen thousand two-legged animals to watch the coloured death of a few four-legged ones.

This woman was dark-eyed, dark-haired; but still no Spaniard.

And she was alive with interest like a native, speaking now and then to those about her with ease in the Spanish tongue; yet puzzled if replies were in Catalan, and in need of gesture in answer to her free Castilian.

"You are French, no, señora?" asked a man at her side, and his brows went up most politely when she shook her head. "English?"

"No, señor. American."

"Ah, American! I have a cousin in Buenos Aires!"

"I am not from *South* America, señor. I am from the Estados Unidos."

"Ah! And where would that be, señora? In Australia?"

"No, no, friend. I am from Nueva York."

"Ah, so? Nueva York! Now I know! Nueva York is very tall, is it not?"

"Yes, very tall indeed. Is that Chiquito now?"

"Yes, yes! Your pretty eyes are quicker than a Spaniard's, señora! That is Little Chico!"

And the roar breaks.

She watched the red-wet game with eager interest—tingling to its music and its loud thrilling noise of throats, following its run and rush and jumping flash of colours with eyes that flashed as swiftly. Yet these swift eyes, that had been so politely referred to by the Spaniard, had in them no game-lust, no brutality. The fervour with which they absorbed this grace of danger-conquering art was the avid keenness of one who by nature, by instinct, seeks and studies the corner things of life—the corner things that in assimilation make possible the queer term “experience.”

“There are good bull-fights in Nueva York, señora?”

“No, señor, no hai nada. There, we think them cruel.”

“Cruel? Well, yes, perhaps—if one thinks of it. It is hard for the horses. But it is very pretty.”

“Yes, it is very pretty.”

She watched—the bright-hued figures, red, pink, yellow, blue, green, gold, silver; spangled, glittering; with their flutter of gaudy cloaks, their running, their escaping, their thrusting of striped *banderillas*; the whole crossed, like a kaleidoscope with a crack in it, by the sudden mad bellowing rush of hulking brown or black as a bull plunged further toward his waiting death.

But once, from chance, she looked at one of the thronged two-legged. Afterward she looked again; and then, frequently.

It was a woman near by, whose face, a moment at a time, then longer, tore the American's keen eyes from the fight and at last engrossed them—a young Spanish woman, alone like herself—in itself strange, for a young Spanish woman—whose gaze was riveted upon the great spectacle, yet whose whole countenance, albeit she rose or sat to see according to the crowd, seemed unalive, expressionless.

A bull died, and another, and another. A fourth, and with it the American's fascinated absorption. Cruel to very tragedy in its bright accoutrement of colours and sunlight, yet it paled for her beside the tragedy hidden

from her, all but the fact of it, by this girl's pale face, which seemed to her like some creator's painting of a soul's mystery. A fifth bull died.

Between the American woman and the Spanish girl the wild mob was standing, pulled to its Spanish feet by Spanish sentiment, raucously cheering, madly stamping, hurling hats and canes and kisses to Chiquito as he made his bowing *pasear* around the ring. It was only a month since Fuentes had been himself hurt, instead of his bull! What a pity to-day, then—accidents are so rare, and so exciting! No! Shame! Yes! No!

Was the girl fearful for Chiquito, thought the American—could that be it? Women were said to have lost their reason through this fighter. But if her case were of that sort, she would be shrilly crying, throwing caresses, displaying her mania proudly to the mob; and the woman, lifting herself by a man's elbow and craning, saw that she was not.

The throng settled down again upon the grey stone tiers. And she watched the girl quite constantly now, scarcely sparing glances to the remainder of the fight. She saw the same unwavering eyes upon every movement, the same unlighted face. . . . The sixth bull died.

The afternoon's deaths and joy were over. The vast crowd poured out, to the jingle of the huge, beautiful, richly caparisoned horses that hooked and dragged forth from the arena the dilapidated carcasses of their worthless brethren that had died in the last fight.

And as their dead victor, the bull, was dragged tunelessly after them by the neck, two women, unnoticed save that one was noticed by the other, were alone with the blood that seeped into the sawdust in the gradual twilight of the great deserted shell.

"Is there anything that I can do to help you?"

The girl started, for the voice had come abruptly, from behind her, and before answering she gazed long and thoughtfully at the woman so suddenly close to her, so inexplicably standing in the dusk on the stone tier above

her. The figure was returning her gaze with the same curious quality of mind and look that, before she noticed the girl, she had given to the bull-fight.

"I did not mean to frighten you. I spoke to you to ask if I could help you."

At this the girl found her voice.

"Excuse me, señora! I am slow-witted lately! To answer your question, I do not know whether you can help me or not."

"So you *are* in trouble?" said the woman.

"Yes, señora, though in somewhat less than I was in, still in great trouble."

"Will you tell me of it?"

"Thank you," said Dulce. "I will tell you, señora, with pleasure. And briefly, too, so that you can know quickly whether you still wish to help me. First, then, I have been bad, *very* bad, and been so for a long time. Two whole years, I think. And for money—understand that. So much for whether you really wish to help me. And in the second place, which concerns my second trouble, I have been lately mad, I think. Anyway, my wits fell apart, a while back. Then a woman helped me—a gypsy. You are the third to do that. No, the fourth or so, for a nun—two nuns I guess—had been kind, though less kind. It is all very strange. Will you make me the favour to tell me why you spoke to me?"

"Because you sat here so dully after the fight was over. And because I had been watching you long before that. Why did you sit here in that way?"

"I do not know—quite," said Dulce. "My wits are still thick, I guess, though they are better. I—I am trying to find out something. I cannot put it in words, and that is the trouble, for if I could, I either would not have to ask, or would probably find that the first person I met could explain it to me—this thing that I am trying to find out. The bull-fight has something of it. Even the gypsy could not tell me what it was. But at least she was sure that my way—my Gran Via—lay in great cities.

Well, Barcelona is something of a city, perhaps a great one after its own fashion, and so I came here from the caravan. The gypsy said that what I seek has to do with great crowds. And that is why I came to the fight. In spite of terrible memories that sat waiting here for me in this arena. It was those memories that made me sit here so stupidly, I guess. But however that may be, there *was* fate in it, you see. Because even if you left me this second, and I never saw you again on account of what I have told you of my character, still it has had fate in it, for you have pounded home to me that women are kind to women."

"I have no intention of 'leaving you this second.' And do not call it my kindness. Call it my curiosity. And whatever you choose to call it, I *do* wish to help you. Are you poor?"

"Yes," said Dulce, "but not penniless yet."

"Did you intend to work?"

"Yes, as soon as I could after to-day."

"At what?"

"I do not know. Anything decent except coal-heaving, and not that only for personal reasons. Work is scarce here for a girl like me. I had hoped never to see Barcelona again—till the gitana told me what she did."

"Would you be my maid?" asked the American.

Dulce stared at her incredulously.

"You actually mean that, not knowing me? Or rather, knowing me for what I am, as I have spoken myself to you?"

"Yes, I mean just that. I am an American, so put it, as you Spaniards do, to my American queerness, if you like. I seldom travel about with a maid. A maid in travelling is a nuisance. But I really need one for my stay in Paris. There, a woman does not quite like to be quite alone. I go to Paris to-morrow."

"*'I go to Paris to-morrow!'*" cried Dulce, her hands unconsciously lifting to her heart with her staring repeti-

tion of the words. "Dio mio, but there is fate in this!"

"I like you," said the American's quiet voice. "Sitting here as if you were a fixed study for some kind of an artist, and yet unaware of it, you have interested me, I would like to know your story, and to help you. But first of all, I need a good maid for Paris and I detest Frenchwomen—as maids. 'Detest' is a thoughtless word. I mean something politer—and worse. Simply, they are *lady*-maids, not *ladies*'-maids. Remember that, when the time comes for you to choose one for yourself—which it very likely will, for I can see you are *diestra*, which we call in English 'clever.' What you do not know, you will learn quickly. Will you go?"

Dulce was trembling. "Holy God, but there *is* fate in it! I am mad on the subject of words, and that word '*diestra*,' '*clevairr*,' is one that I have forever used about myself! There is fate in words!"

"In this one," said the American, smiling, "this *diestra*, you Spaniards have a second meaning, that of 'right hand,' the same as your *mano derecha*. Such things, we poor Americans learn in our conventional, terribly correct lessons in Spanish, or French, or—well, we would in Hebrew too, I suppose; and they stay in our minds, instead of enough grammar. About '*diestra*,' you would have to be my right hand, you see. The fate in it, therefore, might be a hard one!"

Dulce was still trembling, and more than ever.

"Hard or not, señora, there is fate in this! For one thing, this fact that you hunt for *meanings* in words, as I do!"

"You go then?"

"Yes."

They went from the dusking arena, out into the great way of the Street of the Cortes. It was the day's twilit hour in which Dulce had joyously traversed it on her long way home from Mont Juich that seventh day, on which God had restlessly unmade her world. Fair lights gleamed

along it through the great bounty of the planeta trees. The plaza at the foot of the arena was deserted. No carriage was to be had. The American would not board a tram. They walked.

At last the big Plaza of the Cataluña glittered ahead, its glow shining sidewise into the Ramblas, its square brilliance intensifying its own deep-green drooping palms and hard, bright yellow dirt. They came into it crossing the head of the lovely Ramblas.

"I stop at the Continental," said the lady.

"The Continental!" breathed Dulce, shrinking back.

They entered it, and went up to the woman's rooms.

CHAPTER XVII

AN ENGLISH WORD

HERE they dined, the woman for a time as silent as the girl—easing her with silence; then, equally helping her by casual speech.

"How do you wish me to dress?" asked Dulce suddenly, during dessert.

The answer was prompt.

"To start with, as my companion, not my maid. For travelling, it is as well, I think. When we are settled in Paris, differently, perhaps. We will see."

"I have some very handsome bits of this and that in a box near-by," said Dulce. "I am rapid, and what we have called clever, at things of the sort; and if you care to send a porter as far as the Calle del Carmen for it, you might approve of something I could slap together. As I am, I look like the devil—or to be exact, a tramp."

"I had thought," said the woman, "that you might wear something of mine. But of course you shall have your box."

"Let us try the box first," said Dulce. "There are some things that I want to give you out of it, anyway."

The woman looked at her in surprise, but checked her curiosity in silence. A porter was dispatched to the address in the Carmen, and pending the box Dulce stirred about the lady's wardrobe.

"Your trunks are how many? Four. That is not as crazy as most Americans. And by the way, if my talk is disrespectful forgive it for the present. I have never been a maid before, you see, and to-night I am very, very much excited."

"Talk just as you choose," said the American. "It will not offend me."

"May I be damned before I hurt your feelings, though," said Dulce.

She was packing deftly, tenderly yet quickly.

"What underclothes you have! And I had always thought that Americans were economical and tawdry about such matters! *Some* liar told me so! You must be wealthy. You have beautiful, expensive things, but no faintest idea how to dress. The Queen of Spain spends a hundred and fifty thousand francs a year on her clothes. Poor thing, she is English, and German before that, and has to. You see, I am particular to say francs, not pesetas, because she buys them in Paris. I will make you look more a queen on next to nothing, later—Paris, or anywhere else."

When the box arrived she turned to it immediately, as if to hasten a dreaded task; but she paused, as she was lifting the cover, to say abruptly:

"By the way, you intended to pay me some wages, I suppose?"

A little embarrassed colour came into the American's cheeks, a little disappointment into her eyes.

"Of course. I had thought we would discuss it later, that is all. I intended to give you exactly what you considered fair and right."

"I thought so," said Dulce. "That is just your character. You are hopelessly extravagant. What with railroad fares, and my keep in hotels, you ought to have me for nothing, with perhaps a little bit over to indulge my pride, and for the sake of business. How much did you pay for that hat, for instance?"

The American's eyes were struggling with a smile.

"A hundred francs, I think."

"There you are," said Dulce. "It was never worth fifty. If I had been with you, the shopman's face would have been well slapped. You see, living in Catalonia here, even we southern Spaniards get to be great bargain-ers, in

self-defence. Though I will say for myself, having told you the worst of me I could, that in my own terrible business I never did, not once, make a brawl about the money part. Something inside me, stopped me—*absolutely*. But to consider what would become of *you* in the Tr—in the same circumstances—of course, the thought sounds absurd, because at your age you never could start such an outrage, quite aside from the positive tornado in your mind that I can see my mere thinking aloud has written on your face. Only, what you said to me to-day about my likely enough having my own maid some day, was a very deep, true thought, whether you were deep about it at the moment or not. For things can change completely about, for anybody—as an instance, and simply another form of the same involved matter, a man might honourably marry you and take every cent of all your money, and you would have to be somebody's maid. Never mine, even for the sake of poetry, because after what you have done to-day I would simply give you the maid-money to live on till you could sue him for it back, and hell take pride, and him. But none of this could happen to-night, or to-morrow, and what I started to say was, that whatever wages you meant to give me, you must lessen somewhat as a matter of business, for I intend to learn English out of you, which is not your fault. For instance, what would you call all this—my being your maid out of a clear sky, and going to Paris with you? I am morbid on the subject of English, on account of a love-matter of my own, and I want to know."

"Why, I suppose," said her mistress with gentle hesitation, "that we would call this your 'instalment.' I can think of no other word to fit exactly what I think you mean."

"Thank you," said Dulce, turning back to the box. "Instalment." And she began to bring forth the contents in batches: "Instalment." "Instalment." "Instalment." "Instalment," until everything was piled upon the floor; her mistress the while considering, and deciding against,

any interruption of her earnest study by reference to the word's chance concern with her chance action.

As her servant spread forth the Manila *mantons*, the lady's combined silent tenderness and amusement were lost in an ejaculation of delight.

"They are for you," said Dulce. "These, and those candlesticks, are what I spoke of."

"Mio Dios, girl!" cried the American. "You——"

"Do not offer to pay for them," said Dulce calmly. "Make me the favour not to. Dio mio, but you have been good to me! And these three, anyway, I could not sell—nor the candlesticks. They were in my family. They are very valuable. My mother and father, if they had had the pleasure of your acquaintance, would probably have told you I stole them. But that would have been a lie. I had them from my grandmother, who really loved me."

She was talking against the woman's protests, and folding the rich fabrics into one of her trunks.

"There is no way out of it you see—I have no trunk, so that even what does stay mine must go into your luggage. While as to the meaning, the sentiment-angle, such others as I had, that I could sell, I did sell, and was quick about it, too. I had had them from the junk-market here. Among them, even one that I had planned should become dearest of all, dearer than its worth that I screeched the junk-market out of, dearer than any family or anything but—well, *thought* of family, and all from the mere touch to it of—an American boot, by the way. When that little plan failed, it happened to be midnight, an hour when the junk-market was closed, so, knowing something about hunger and those yonder not to be done for that way, I sold them—with *it*—to the old woman who runs the Carmen house I lodged in. One must be practical—for instance, so far as family is concerned, those that I have put in your trunk *you* could sell for food, and no second thought about it. My family—a sister, and a rude one, in Sevilla—and yours, are con-

tinents, not to mention drawing-rooms, apart. Make me the favour to think as I do about them."

The American woman's voice was very low, though clear, and gentler than ever, as she said:

"It will be decided later."

"It is—settled," said Dulce, startling the woman less with her decisiveness than with her grasp and intentional use of the word her mistress had somewhat arduously picked from her Spanish for reference to their stay in Paris. And the girl's next speech made another surprising jump.

"May I call in the room-maid for a purpose?"

"Certainly."

Across the bed Dulce placed a hat, a gown, fresh linen, from the pile; and into her mistress's trunks the rest of the finer linens. All the remaining gaudy confusion on the floor she threw back into the box. The room-maid had entered. Dulce turned to her.

"Answer me this, girl, and speak truthfully. You are poor?"

"Very, señorita."

"And good? Or for that reason bad? Speak truthfully again, now!"

The girl flushed, speechless from either surprise or anger or from both.

"Well, well, your face answers, clearly enough," said Dulce. "Now, I know all about such matters, so be honest with me, and do your part of a bargain. Take out that box, and everything in it is yours. Quite a little value is inside it, and for your sort, more than a little. Take it all; and in return, for my sake—for *my* sake, I tell you—to the money value of it as close as you can figure, stay good for a while. You understand me. I can see that you do. Take it, and mind you obey!"

When the startled maid was gone, she found the American regarding her with quizzical, half-closed eyes; yet eyes that had none of the languor of drooped lids, had

much that was further-reaching than quizzical in their questioning thoughtfulness.

"You are a strange girl!" she said.

"Very," said Dulce. "I have often said so myself." And she added, in her abrupt manner: "It happens to be another of my favourite words about my own character. And speaking of that, what would be your word in English for what I did to that girl just now? Or by means of her, rather? You saw and heard what I did, but I will explain it to you a little, and perhaps then you can tell me the word. I paid her, you see, and what I paid was the first French franc, or Methican peso, or so, of a great big debt that I have to pay. Now, what would you call that?"

The American pondered, biting her lip in her seriousness of thought, for she knew by now that with this girl, at this striking hour of her strange spirit, words were serious matters, deep as waters, powerful as wines.

"Why, my girl," she said at last, "strangely enough it is the same word that I told you before—with a different meaning. I have already thought of this, for so it applied to your portions of things as you piled them on to the floor. But now, concerned especially with money, it is much more perfectly to the point, and is the same word exactly, and the only one I know in English for it—"instalment"!"

Dulce stared at her incredulously for a moment, then sat down almost dazedly on the edge of the bed.

"I knew there was a lot in words," she said. "I told you there was fate in all of this!"

In the bright morning, in the Estacion de Francia, she trembled so violently that her mistress wondered; and helped her, rather than received her help, into the train. . . . It was from this place, probably at this hour, that he had gone . . . perhaps, in this very car. . . .

As with a jolt of its couplings it drew from the yard her heart, too, jolted; but she looked out of window and

with the motion, and the softness of the grey-damasked luxurious compartment, she grew gradually calm.

Away from the sea, past the giant skeleton of the new cathedral, past the ruined castle back of Mataró, on away from Mataró itself, on away from Caldetas, into the green and yellow hills, the long train ran twisting, twisting, twisting, twisting; but with its iron nose forever sniffing toward Paris.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WORLD'S HEART

THEY had understood each other's name—Dulce, Mrs. Rugg—and in some part, history, by the time they were "settled" in Paris, in a hotel turned just off the Avenue de l'Opéra, at one of the city's unceasing angles, in the rue de l'Echelle, their windows gazing down to the Palais Royal and its endless traffic, which Dulce's enthralled eyes drank up in fascinated awe.

"Settled" was the lady's term for their domestication, in its own English now, instead of roundabout in her castellano, for by now she had sensed as well as known the girl's avidity for foreign words, yet was still to be ever and anon startled by the swift intuition and extraordinary memory which, she found, had led them before the close of a week into a grammarless jargon of Spanish and French patterned with bold grotesques of American vernacular.

As to their understanding of the two names, it gave on to marked differences of feeling. Mrs. Rugg was pleased with Dulce's, and commented prettily that she deserved it.

"That," said Dulce, "has been mentioned before," and she rambled into an account of Simpatica, and thence into other reminiscences of the holy little town in the foothills so near the Mountain of the Grail; and in turn her mistress, who had climbed Montserrat, told Dulce of its wonderful legend.

"How ignorant I am!" exclaimed Dulce. "Now, evidently of all things in my own country, I should have seen that! Just as you say you are ashamed to know the

bull-fight, not because it is such a lot of blood, but because you have never seen Niagara Falls, which is such an uncommon amount of water!"

And she asked innumerable questions about everything else that even approached the United States.

"I do not say 'America,' you see. I am not so stupid about geography as the man at the bull-fight that you mentioned. There are many Spaniards just like him, who think that California is Manila, and Canada Methico. You can scarcely blame them, for the mere shape of this world is confusing to a vulgar mind. But I am different. I know the *Estados Unidos* when I hear them talked of! And if Spaniards may believe one-tenth of what they do hear talked of, things are certainly very different over there. Society things. Marriages, for instance. We—I mean Spanish aristocrats, and I am at least a fraction of one—think your customs about marriages very free and shocking. But for my own part, I think that if we were more like you and lovers knew a great deal about each other—I mean within reason, of course—before they got married, it would save a lot of unhappiness afterwards. Americans hate our strict way, and I really cannot blame them. Let me tell you, for instance . . ."

Mrs. Rugg thought herself listening, but so intent had become her gently studious gaze upon the girl's features that for a few moments she realized no vocal sense. As if there were indeed some active virtue in the white witchcraft of crystal-gazing, and her maid's dark eyes were crystals, she seemed to see in them staidly moving figures of young girls and old duennas, duennas no poor little family of little Cadiz could afford, and it was with a feeling of startlement for her that the syncopation of Dulce's small meandering recital was ended by an abrupt leap of the girl's speaking mind back to the United States again:

"Now, what would have happened in such a case in the United States, Mrs.—Mrs. Rr—r——"

Despite her quick gift for words, she had great difficulty with Mrs. Rugg's harsh name, a fact which in this instance rescued the American from the difficulty of an answer. Dulce's sensitive ear could not quite grasp the two g's, and written out, their defiance of the Spanish alphabet overpowered her completely. When in addition she learned the name's meaning, she became more dissatisfied than ever.

"'Rug'!" she exclaimed in Spanish. "Who ever heard of such a thing for a pretty woman? You should be a Turk! Still, it is part and parcel, I suppose, with your being an 'Americana,' which means a jacket, and a man's at that—the coat of his business-suit. I suppose the hideous things were invented in your country. Well, I admit it would seem odd for a gentleman to wear velvet trousers and a sash to the Bourse. . . . I had no such thought when I suggested a plan with a dreadful lie in it about the Bourse one time. . . . And I admit, too, that I have seen an American suit that I loved very much, and that I suffered when I saw the coat slashed up. . . . But *Rr—r—*"

Finally, she abandoned her efforts altogether, and called her nothing at all, until several days later, when she suddenly christened her mistress "Doña Rina." This was upon her having learned that Rina was Mrs. Rugg's first name.

"I have been trying to think something out," she said. "'Doña Rina' sounds as if it were one word, some especially pretty Spanish name, but 'Doña,' of course, is a title, so that it really has a lot of respect in it."

Mrs. Rugg smiled—as the American's multiplying interest in her curious companion doubtless would have allowed her to smile no matter what address she had adopted. This interest of the older woman's had been quickened by one detail very early in their association—Dulce's prompt estimate of her:

"I know what you are—you are *tediosa*. *Enmuyée*

Bored. No?" And the shot had gone appropriately home.

"I am not really, Dulce. With my own circumstances, yes. Not with things, however. I am interested, interested, interested. In you, for example."

"I understand perfectly," Dulce had said. "I know, exactly what you mean by 'things.' I am a 'thing,' beyond doubt. But exactly what kind, God knows, and when I find out, I will be very interesting indeed. *Oui will bet!*—Did that make sense?"

She said this with a seriousness that in some degree was forever with her, and that would deepen, for long hours together, into a sombre spirit that turned the American's pleasure in her to positive pain. But she never over-urged her confidence. The girl's history and its acute spiritual significance to her seeped out little by little—in abrupt small philosophies betraying the far tangents of her brooding mind, and in long passionate silences that in idle hours would come upon her and set her lips tight and darken her eyes to a dull, mystic black.

"I wish I could help you, Dulce," Mrs. Rugg would say, coming up behind her.

"Perhaps you could, Doña Rina, if only I could help myself a little first. I think, somehow, that I will understand presently. Anyway, the gypsy said I would, and at once up you pop like a Punch and Judy show and fetch me to Paris. So doubtless I am intended to find here what I am hunting for. There is fate in it. I think you can tell me a lot, as soon as I know what to ask you. The trouble is there."

"You should not brood so much. Shall we go out, Dulce?"

"Yes," and Dulce would dress them both for the street, herself as "companion" still, not servant, and they would fall upon the shops.

At first, despite the luring regal glitter of the rue de la Paix and the Parisian uniqueness of the great circling boulevards, she had feared the streets, suffused with a

dread of glimpsing, even of meeting face to face, the sovereign of her strange thoughts. But as the intricate vastness of the spider's-web of Paris dawned more and more upon her imagination, she lost, gradually, the sense of this danger, and with awakened inquisitiveness began to involve her mistress in assaults of shopping that evolutionized the American from chrysalis to butterfly—one that lit fearfully upon its purse now and then, only to find this remarkably undepleted.

"You are a marvel, Dulce!"

"I told you I would be, Doña Rina. You are as pretty as I am, now.—By the way, is that offensive?"

Mrs. Rugg laughed and coloured.

"From anyone else, it would be tragic. But I seem to understand the things you say, and how you say them. You hurt me precisely once, and I was not offended, really, then."

"What was it—Doña? I will punish myself, you may be sure!"

"I do not wish you to punish yourself. It was that night in Barcelona. You said I had no faintest idea how to dress. It hurt because it was true. You have proven it now, and repaired it, too."

"I must be more careful of my tongue," said Dulce, reflectively. "For I long, Doña Rina, literally long, to be a lady—to be a lady in every possible way. And I have the instincts, I think. For instance, on the train . . . when that wicked old merchant with the wife and babies in Stuttgart insulted us at Toulouse and tried to stay in our compartment. Now, knowing me, as you do, for what I am—or was, rather—who was I to resent it as I did? One would naturally suppose that I would have been perfectly vulgar and taken it as a matter of course, whereas instead I was absolutely an outraged patrician, telling him he would roast in hell, the baboon. Do you remember?"

"I shall never forget!" said Mrs. Rugg.

Day after day, they would drive—for successive hours,

the woman intent upon the girl's masked yet graphic mind as it absorbed the inexhaustible panorama. Dulce's lips would be most silent when her eyes most spoke. Mile upon mile she would sit without speech, the eyes dreaming as they drank. Once she said:

"It is the heart of the world, I think."

"You have a touch of the poeta in you, Dulce."

"I have indeed, Doña Rina. You have no idea how much."

Then silence again, all the way home; that brooding silence with the lips set, the dusky eyes far off, hot with their battle of seeking.

To-day mistress and maid were happily aimless, rambling like Spaniards from shop to shop in the Avenue de l'Opéra, looking rather than buying. They stopped at the window of a music shop.

"'Valse Brune,'" said Dulce, reading from a popular song-sheet. "What soft words! The French is pretty, is it not?"

"I have kept telling you so, Dulce. Shall we buy the song? Do you read music, Dulce?"

"No.—Yes.—I do not know. A little, when I have heard a thing. Let me see. . . ." She moved on a step and stood before a copy of the song that was laid open. "Why, yes, I can! And do you know what this is, Doña Rina? It is my favourite song, the Apache waltz—the Cavalier de la Luna! And I always thought it was a Spanish song! We call it sometimes *La Apache*."

She began to hum it, following the notes with her eyes. But suddenly, inexplicably, she found the eyes blind with tears. Mrs. Rugg pressed her arm silently. She knew that part of the story. And they walked on.

"There," said Dulce abruptly, as they stood on what Mrs. Rugg termed an "isle o' safety," surrounded by the whirling traffic of the Place de l'Opéra, "there, Doña Rina, is the most beautiful building in the world. Little as I have seen of the world, there is no doubt of it. It is ravishing!" And she nodded toward the Opéra.

"You may go to Rome some day," said Mrs. Rugg, "and think as the Romans think of some of their buildings. Still, I will not really dispute you." Presently they were passing round the side of it, by the big gilded statue, and Dulce, in her inevitable craving for new words, halted them before the small opera-poster.

"*'Melba'*! What a lovely word! That is absolute music in one word. Is it a great singer?"

"The greatest in the world, most people think. Shall we hear her, Dulce?"

"Holy God, yes!" And they hastened to a ticket agency.

"Now, if I were a great singer," said Dulce as they came out, "I would certainly have trouble finding a name as pretty and liquid as that for myself . . . *Nellie Melba*," and she lilted the two words, correctly, and with exquisite tenderness. "But I should find it somehow. . . . I am always clever at such matters."

They were hesitating on the sidewalk in the sunshine, bereft of object, and once more stalled by the whirlwind-whirlpool of traffic sweeping into the Place from the boulevards.

"The Ramblas are a bit like them. Suppose we go to the Luxembourg Gardens, Doña Rina, and see the autumn flowers again—Spain has flowers, but nothing like that intentional luxury at the Luxembourg!"

The American had fallen into a habitual recourse to her whimsical leadership, giving her a loose rein of caprice, which in Dulce's hands was always guided by some earnest, unspoken mood; and accordingly they wandered, afoot, across the island and through the old quarter to the Luxembourg, and in among the luxurious rows of thousands of chrysanthemums and asters and geraniums.

"What a city!" breathed Dulce. "Just look at all this, that everyone can see without even the asking! How they think, here, of the people! Or, is it the people that does the thinking?"

"You make me think," said Mrs. Rugg.

"See, it is already closing time, Doña Rina. I meant to ask you something here in the gardens, but I got thinking instead. Suppose we go down into the little garden on the cathedral island, and watch the sunset. We will not be turned out of that. . . . And I am anxious to ask you this thing."

So they walked back, and half across the Pont Neuf onto the Cité, and Dulce led eagerly down through the bridge into the diminutive Garden of the Vert-Galant. They found themselves alone in it with the dimming trees, the great glinting breasts of the Seine gliding by. The great heart of the world was beating beyond them and above them with streams of traffic, like giant corpuscles, rushing through its arteries in the dusk, as they sat quietly watching the last lavender streaks of sunset and the silver reflections of the bridge-lights in the water.

"May I ask you this question, Doña Rina?"

"Make me the favour to, my dear."

Dulce pressed her hand at this first word of spoken affection.

"There could be no better place to ask it, Doña Rina. . . . This pretty little park, here at the very point of the old island in the middle of this wonderful town, seems to me to be the very heart of the world's heart . . . and what I wish to ask you is this: Doña Rina, what is the meaning of 'Society'? The meaning of the word? Not fashion. I know that meaning. And not a certain class of people, high or low or medium. I understand that. But just Society? The word itself, with a capital, say, and no 'el' or 'la' or 'le' or 'the' in front. What is the signification of it? I use a long word there, and I think I do correctly, for I have been thinking this question out for a long time. Since even before I knew you. What is it, Doña Rina?"

"I—I will try to answer you, Dulce," said the elder woman; and she fell silent, hunting for words.

"I have heard," Dulce went on, "the expression 'A debt to Society.' Well, I can understand that, so far as the

debt goes. As you must know, I owe such a debt. . . . A frightful one. . . . So much I know perfectly well. But what is this thing, Doña Rina, that I owe it to?"

"It is a hard, hard question, Dulce." Mrs. Rugg's voice was low, and more gentle than her servant had ever heard it before, and with a touch of trouble in it. "Dulce, I too have a story, and I too owe a debt, though the story is different, and therefore my debt, I suppose, must be different too. I was married, you know—for certain little dry facts about me you naturally do know; and my husband is alive, which is quite news to you. I—I kicked him out, Dulce, and to kick a man out is a terrible thing to have to do. . . . I had to. . . . Well, that tells you nothing, except that necessarily it means some dreadful chapters in my life, dreadful teaching chapters, teaching unsuspected things of oneself, and of others; and that therefore—thereby—I probably understand something of this problem of yours, and of your effort to know just what it is you owe, and what you owe it to, and just how to pay it. Society, dear, first of all, is people, just *people*—and what you, dear, owe to 'just *people*' I cannot say. It is too big and personal a thing for me to dare to put my hands on—if I could. But what everyone with any power, any power and any brains combined, owes to People, or Society, is, I suppose, what we call 'the greatest good to the greatest number.' Does that convey anything to you? Does that help, even a little, Dulce?"

"Yes!" cried Dulce gladly. "Yes, yes! '*The greatest good to the greatest number!*' That is a wonderful phrase!"

"How to do that greatest good, Dulce, I do not know even in my own case. Because, I guess, I have lacked power, lacked even direction of myself, and never so much as struggled to know what was right for me to do, as you are struggling. If I had, I might be of some value to 'Society' now, for I have always been thirsty for knowledge—not of persons, Dulce, but of People. See how we

come around in a circle to that word! I remember when I was a small girl just able to delve in books, I used to wonder and wonder, as I read story after story, 'Why is it that nobody tells stories about People? About Peoples?' And such stories—histories, Dulce—have been written. Yet books, even such books, have never held the answer to my own problem. For to me, they were still just stories, fascinating stories, from which I learned only that the answer was somewhere in my own soul, and nowhere else. And there, Dulce, I have been too cowardly to hunt. . . . You, dear, are brave. You are hunting there—in your own soul—nobly, unafraid."

Darkness, full darkness spotted only with golden and silver lights like strings of stars, had closed in upon them as they sat in the little garden between the coursing waters.

"I *am* afraid, but I have *got* to hunt there," said Dulce, simply.

"Why, Dulce?" Mrs. Rugg asked it in an almost frightened whisper.

"Or go mad," said Dulce, as if she had not heard her.

CHAPTER XIX

THE HOUSE OF THE GREAT VOICE

THEY went early to the Opéra, and from above the great stairway looked down upon it and the arriving crowds. Dulce's eyes were wide with an astonishment that turned gradually to silent rapture as Doña Rina guided her through the promenades. She feasted on the painted walls, the gorgeous ceilings. She insisted upon dragging Mrs. Rugg down the whole great stairway again . . . and up again . . . and through the glittering promenades again. "I have never seen anything so lovely! No, even the outside did not hint it!"

At last she consented to go back to their seats.

"No, you must sit at my right hand, Doña Rina—remember you said I was to be your 'mano derecha.' Then I can get at the back of your neck better if those three hairs flop out again. Well, well, sitting down we certainly look as well as these Frenchwomen, anyhow. Our gowns *are* pretty! Do you remember the row I had to make them cut mine low enough? And that was not on account of my character, Doña Rina, truly. It was purely because I really *am* rather lovely in that direction, so why not? Now, being all ready and waiting for the curtain, and with no one more to step on us—what would you call that? Would you call that 'settled,' too?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Rugg, emphatically, "and something else is 'settled, too'—that you are going to stay with me for the rest of my natural life."

"I would like to, Doña Rina," said Dulce gravely. "But how can one tell? The only thing that never fails to stay with you straight through life is fate. Fate was

at the bull-fight. Fate may be here at the opera to-night."

"Have you been often to the opera, Dulce?"

"Yes, quite often. Once at Madrid, with the man who—but I—told you all that. And frequently in Barcelona, at the *Licéo*."

"You have heard *Bohème* before, then?"

"No, never *Bohème*. *Traviata*, and *Carmen*—several times *Carmen*. And quite a few Italian ones besides *Traviata*. *Carmen* is by a Frenchman, is it not? That is very strange. It is strange, to begin with, that we have no Spanish operas. For we are a musical people, right through our bones, and love music, I think, much more than these French appear to. Yet we write no great operas. We cannot live without music in the streets, day and night. And here, there is no street music, although they wrote *Carmen*. If they can do that, why no music in the streets? Perhaps they love flowers more. Paris seemed very hollow and empty to me, till I realized what the trouble was."

The opera began.

Dulce listened, instantly and continuously, as if she were a dry sponge, and the sound water. Mrs. Rugg was more intent upon Dulce than upon the music. She was watching for the moment when the girl should hear the first note of the great voice that was coming. And suddenly, Dulce started as with a spiritual shock.

A tremor went through her. Then she sat back like some voluntary statue, soundless, motionless. . . .

At the fall of the curtain, she did not join in the thunder. And when it finally died away, she turned briefly to her companion.

"I—I did not know there was anything in the world like that! I did not know that the whole *Gran Via* ever gave one anything like that! May we walk in the corridors till the next act, Doña Rina, and look at the beautiful stairway again? One must always be walking in one

way or another—Melba, for instance, hunting for that! I—I am very nervous.”

“Then of course we shall walk, dear.”

And once more they stood at a point giving on to the famous stairway, in a corridor filled with slowly wandering crowds to whose rich glitter Dulce had now turned her back, for she was gazing down upon the beautiful ladder of architecture as if the top of any ascending head might be covering the fate she had talked of.

“Doña Rina,” she murmured, “you have called me ‘poeta,’ and as a ‘poeta,’ I would call this, I think, ‘The House of the Great Voice.’”

“Yes, dear,” answered Mrs. Rugg gently. “And,” she added swiftly, “the stairway of it does deserve your eyes!”

The last crisp words had been as instinctive as they were quick, for the American, as if through the very finger-tips which she had laid upon the girl’s beautiful naked shoulder, had felt eyes fastened strangely on the white shining skin, and defensively, defiantly, Mrs. Rugg was seeking those eyes.

When they met hers, they seemed to her to be of a colour that was almost violet, that was peculiarly beautiful in the shadow of the young man’s heavy yellow hair; they were filled, too, with a conflicting startlement and doubt that made them pathetic, and it was with an almost personal shudder at their power of fascination that she launched at the man, in one long, fierce, daring stare, her whole proud heritage of American womanhood, her whole passionate protection of the unconscious girl beneath her fingers.

His face flushed to a deep red. For one instant the eyes seemed to plead with her—to let him more fully see the woman in the rich and elegant gown whom she was covering from him. But Mrs. Rugg’s eyes unyieldingly drove him mercilessly back into the crowd from which he had so suddenly stepped. She saw him offer his arm to a young girl who was looking confusedly about near-by.

With a last desperately endeavouring and unsuccessful glance back of him, he was gone.

Dulce stood suddenly erect and turned to her.

"What is the matter, Doña Rina? I felt your fingers trembling on me. Are you tired of seeing me star-gazing? Shall we go back to our seats?"

They left the small lacuna of humanity where they had stood amid the swarming surge, and drifted back with the tide of crowds into the auditorium. When they were again "settled," Dulce softly asked:

"Do you know, Doña Rina, why I used the word 'star-gazing,' when I had been looking *down*? It—it was because I thought I might see *him*. I imagine he must be still in Paris somewhere. How human we are, always! Here I have been dreading that very thing, for one sight of him would probably put me back, back, back along the road I am trying to travel. And to-night I feel fate so strongly in this house, that I think that marvellous voice is leading me somewhere. I seem to feel each note of it fetching me a step nearer what the gitana talked of . . . great crowds . . . and the voice, note by note, seems to build up like a pyramid. . . . And yet, feeling all that, feeling it like feeling a friend trying to urge me along the Great Way, I had to stare down the beautiful ladder, hoping for the terrible pain and set-back of seeing him. And it was there I looked, because, in the strangest way, I always seem to picture him as climbing up toward me—struggling up—yet never reaching me, for everything gets dark. Everything got dark in that big well of the stairway for a moment. So now I am trembling with anxiety to hear that voice again, Doña Rina. There is light for me in that voice. I feel darkness and fate in this house, yet that voice seems to light up all the shadows of that big stage—to me it seems to light up those terrible dim canvas wings."

"Dulce," said Mrs. Rugg, her voice troubled, "I—I am glad to have you say that—about being set back—not wanting to be. I begin to understand you so well, that I

fear for you, with you; and just now, as you were looking down 'the beautiful ladder,' I caught a man appraising you—I can call it nothing else, though to be just I think he could not help it. And I was so frightened for you in case you saw, that I glared at him—glared him out of countenance so that he slunk away. Was that an impertinence to you, Dulce? Did I do right?"

"I thank you for it, Doña Rina—Dona Rina *dear*," said Dulce softly. There was sudden darkness in the house. The act began.

Once, and then again, Mrs. Rugg heard her whisper to herself: "Holy God! . . . Holy God!"

And thus the remainder of the play passed for them—almost in silence.

At breakfast the next morning Mrs. Rugg said: "Dulce, I am going to Versailles this afternoon—to a friend's house. Shall you go? It is for you to decide."

Dulce hesitated a moment. "N-no, Doña Rina, I—we—we would both be embarrassed." She added, after a few moments: "Doña, there is no way for me to tell you how good you are to me. Asking me to your friend's house, for instance. But then, you know how good you are."

They were her first voluntary words since the close of the opera. Her mood of silence had been deeper, more painful to see, than ever before. Her brooding, manifold, was upon her, suffusing her eyes with their hungry look of troubled, speechless need, crying out in their dark misty silence the desperate anxiety of her seeking.

"I have to go, Dulce, or I would not leave you as you are to-day. I shall worry at your being alone. Unless you will promise me to do something or go somewhere. You have not been in the Louvre. Will you go there?"

"What is the Louvre?"

"That enormous building around the Tuileries gardens. The museum. The greatest in the world."

"Oh, yes," said Dulce, listlessly. "I suppose I ought

to go to it, now I am here. As I used to go sometimes to the Prado. Yes, I will go there, Doña Rina."

"I think I shall drive to Versailles. I will drop you at the entrance to the Louvre. With your 'touch of the poeta,' Dulce, you are sure to enjoy it."

"If it is beautiful, of course I shall, Doña Rina." And after luncheon Mrs. Rugg set her down at the entrance from within the gardens.

"It closes at four, I think, Dulce. Anyway, you should be home before me. Promise me not to go anywhere else, Dulce!"

"I promise, Doña Rina."

"Remember how I would worry if you were not home. Good-bye, dear."

"Good-bye, Doña Rina."

They had said the farewell in English, and the repeated word stayed in Dulce's mind as the motor sped away. She went into the great Palace as if her step through the grey portal in some mysterious way were shutting her in truth from her kind benefactress, and the thought was strongly, unreasoningly with her as her eyes travelled through her first careless, unstudied glance at the tremendous hall. Only its size grasped her senses, and as with a message of loneliness.

Then, as the perspective lengthened magically before her vision, a little quick breath escaped her with a tangible sound, and in one of the impulses peculiar to her she went straight forward to a guard at the foot of the big stairway, and addressed him in a quick mixture of garbled French and Spanish.

"Friend, I am a Spaniard, but a few days at Paris. What is the word in French for *to hang*? Comprend tu moi? There is something here—dans les halles—ici—which is pendiente—pendiente y gentil!"

"Ah, oui, mademoiselle!" said the guard suddenly; and he graphically raised his hands. "Gentil? Les articles des arts—ils sont très 'gentil'! Est-il comme ça, mademoiselle?"

As she wandered on and up the broad stairway, a curious thrill went through her, queerly recurring as she climbed, sweeping through her again and again as her slow, awed ramble first brought her to a halt before the Victory, then bore her up and on, into one of the transverse galleries, where the commingling colours of a thousand pictures stretched glowing before her and around her. She paused, again and again, breathlessly before one and another and another till the overpowering sense of too great luxury whirled her mind back to the Victory and the quiet colour of its marble, and she tried to retrace her steps.

But they were lost as a desert track under the wind. She had turned somewhere . . . and forgotten . . . and she was in a new gallery, its huge vista marching away before her like the vast mystic spaces of a dream.

It seemed to her dazzled eyes and brain as though miles of rich beauty were reaching endlessly, infinitely, through the great house.

"It is a Gran Via in itself!" she breathed; and these words were to flash and re-flash in her memory like some particularity of a beautiful gem's facet. On and on she walked, bewildered more and more, her amazement growing from awe very near to fright . . . on and on through this great way, through the great rooms that a waiting monarch had expectantly prepared for Catharine de Medici, on and on through this house whose ravishing accoutrement cried out aloud the rape of Europe for her terrific wealths of form and colour, the form and colour given to Spirit . . . on through the amassment of beauty representative of Peoples and of Time—of years, centuries, ages, epochs, of nations dead, alive, and dying. . . . She was dumbstruck, beyond the one poor question that rose and strove to speak through her striving, bedazed mind: "What does it all mean? What does it all mean?"

Fluctuations of spirit rose and fell in her, waves of a strange joy never before tasted, surging through her soul

productive with sensations of colour that seemed to become sound . . . as if she were in the glowing power of a strong, unfamiliar wine. . . .

Yet, for all its oversweeping strength and strangeness, a wine with one element that was not unfamiliar, that was in very essence familiarity, historically personal familiarity. It was a golden intoxicant; and in it, through it, had been detailed flashes: Murillos, superb, superlative Murillos, but flashes too poignant to be quaffed separately out of their rich vessels now, details truly, only, in this greater, this huge *vaporoso* ubiquitous here. . . .

On and on she walked still, marvelling with fresh gladness at each recurrent sweep and throb of her emotion. . . . Snatches of unformulated thought came to her, alive again out of the mists of her early childhood, thoughts early as any memories of the Paduan Francis on the wall—imaginative, wild little thoughts that had defied, as her child lips had not dared defy, the fond, fervently fearing old grandmother who had drawn, for that very early mind, miracles and mysteries of her old, great Faith. They were little, instinctive, fluttering thoughts, forgotten long ago, but evidently not dead . . . not dead. . . .

On, on, through corridors of Egyptology into further and still further rooms, rooms alive with more and more of paintings, of pottery, of jewels, and furniture, and fabrics, and more pictures, pictures, pictures. . . .

"And all this, all this, is here for People—just *People*—for Society!"

As she breathed the words the queer new joy swept over her once more.

"What does it mean? What does it all mean?"

She paused, with a little startled cry, in a gallery very rich with Murillo again, and with Velasquez.

"So Spain really has given, too—given so that it counts, and shows! Given forever, part of—of *This!* Thanks to God for that! Thanks to God!" Then she went on, on, on in the silent glow and labyrinthine tumult

of luxuriant colour, while through the great house a voice seemed to gather and speak to her . . . a vast, murmuring, inarticulate voice, mysterious, miraculous, of sheer spirit, yet which spoke, whispering to her intricately sensitive mind, to her boundless susceptibility, with all the beauty, all the music, of that great voice of the night before. . . . Shadows crept along the Seine, yet Dulce still crept through the dusking galleries, walking . . . walking into this exquisite new-found life along floors that Marie Antoinette had walked . . . lifting her head the more to drink in her new-found life between walls at sight of whose mere outside shell Marie Antoinette, trundling to death, had bowed her proud head in memory of all the hidden beauty, and wept. . . .

"We close, mademoiselle! We close! You must go!"

She was standing on the wide stairs again, breathing in the marble softness of the Victory, the poised onrush of its Samothracian wings. A guard was shaking her by her shoulder, and presently she found herself, shaking verily from shoulders to feet, in the dim gardens of the Tuileries. She moved slowly to a seat beneath the spectral form of a great naked woman's statue, and sat down, quivering.

For a long while she sat there in the quick and quicker darkness, breathing heavily, shivering heedlessly in the chill night-wind of November that swept mercilessly through the distant Arch of Triumph and down through the whole length of the mammoth lane of gardens.

Suddenly she started up, turned toward the rue de Rivoli, and began to run—fearlessly, swiftly.

CHAPTER XX

"AT LAST I KNOW!"

MRS. RUGG had been nervously waiting in her room and was standing, expectant, eagerly anxious, when Dulce whirled in and swooped excitedly upon her.

"At last I know! Holy God, Doña Rina, at last I know!"

"What *is* the matter, Dulce? You have frightened me terribly! What *is* it?"

"My hunt is over, Doña Rina! At last I *know*!"

"Try to be quiet, Dulce! You must eat, dear—you may tell me later!"

And she paid no heed to the stream of ejaculatory speech, but with "mistress" long forgotten she now slipped through the transition from comrade to maid in her own turn, and managed to take away the girl's hat and wraps, to ring for wine, to make her drink it.

"See—see what I bought for you, Dulce—on the bed there! I was so nervous and frightened about you that I had to go out and walk and walk, and I got this for you—the *Valse Brune*! I thought we would get in a piano—I can play a little. And you can sing it for me!"

But she could no longer stem the girl's dammed up flow of words, and Dulce, her eyes madly lit, and her dormant Latin gesture drawing her hands and arms into rapid movement, sprang to her feet and broke into her characteristic wild pacing of the floor.

"Doña Rina, I have got to leave you!"

"Leave me, Dulce? *Dulce*!"

"Yes! Yes! Let me tell you! I have words at last! I have *the* word! It was all meant, Doña Rina! My

meeting you, Paris, the Opéra, the Louvre! Most of all, the Louvre! I found out there! I found there what I was hunting for. Thank God! At last I know! And it was all but one little word, just one—think of that! Yet, it is exactly as if I knew a whole new language! That word is Art, Doña Rina, Art, do you hear? I myself have heard it, and said it, hundreds and even thousands of times, I suppose, and never knew what it meant until to-day, when a great voice seemed to tell me, there in the Louvre. . . . Even last night, when I heard *that* great voice, I did not comprehend, though since I have heard the greater one in the Louvre, the other comes even closer home to me! Do you think that I am crazy, Doña Rina?"

"No, dear, no, but I am frightened!"

"You would not be frightened, Doña mia, if you understood. So I will try to speak more slowly. For I have the words now, and if I only can speak slowly enough for you to hear them, you will understand! Doña, dear, dear Doña Rina, it is all as clear as glass to me, now, this secret that I have been aching and straining and eating my heart to find. That is wonderful, is it not? Especially since the gypsy told me it would be so, and that it would be in a great city, and that I must leave the caravan at Barcelona, where instantly I meet *you!* Dio, Dio, you know a lot about me, Doña Rina, you know all of the *story* part. But let me tell you, the rest of me I myself did not know until to-night!"

She sat down suddenly, after her old fashion in her old poor room, on the edge of Mrs. Rugg's bed, but she gave her listener no pause for answer.

"Just think, Doña Rina, of having a whole great palace, and all its wonderful rich treasures, murmuring to you, *speaking* to you, telling you *their* story and their meaning! There in the Louvre, that miracle happened to me—a sheer miracle, just as straight from God, whoever He is, or whatever He is. . . . And part of the miracle is, that I am not afraid to say such questioning things

any more—such questioning things as 'whoever,' and 'whatever.' Doña Rina, I am not afraid of *anything* any more, except being *bad*. Just suddenly, I seemed to understand, and I am not afraid!

"I am not even afraid of *blood* any more, since I heard that voice, and you do not know what that is for a Spaniard, Doña Rina, a Spanish girl born in the red shadow of the convent!

"No, I tell you that even as I say the words, I am no longer afraid of blood, and the fearful idea of blood sacrifice! In the bull-fight, yes, yes, it now, I think, would horrify me there, where I never *used* to be afraid . . . but in religion? No!

"Those are terrible words, perhaps, Doña Rina, but not half so terrible as some that my—my José Luis said to me when I made him find words for—for what I did. He said it was 'Traffic in God,' and—and *that*, Doña Rina, is the only thing I have any fear of now!"

"And that, dear," said Doña Rina gently, "you need never fear again—oh, surely, surely!"

"Not only that, Doña Rina, but I know, now, how to pay back for what I did—how to pay back into Society for what I stole from it. The great voice told me to-day: Art. And *the money I get from it*—but that part is a small incidental matter between me and God, whereas the art itself is a matter between me and the People—'just *people*.' . . . Do you understand me a little, Doña Rina?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the woman, her troubled eyes brimming over as she spoke. "Yes! But why did you say you were going to leave me, Dulce? I will help, my dear, not hinder!"

"Dear, dear Doña, all that is fate!" cried Dulce. "You know how strongly I feel fate, and I know what I must do! Last night began it—began my waking up, though I did not fully wake until to-day. At the Opéra, I was stirring and struggling in my sleep, pleading with *that* voice to help wake me, but it took to-day's bigger

voice to do so *much*! Doña Rina, you do not know it, and I myself never *realized* it before, but *I* have a voice, a *great* voice, and I felt it and in my sleep *knew* it last night, when that angel was singing and I had to sit holding tight to myself not to open my own throat, as she would lift back her lovely white one as she does, and sing *with* her! . . . And this afternoon, that greater voice whispered to me what I could do with mine! You see, Doña Rina, the Louvre and not the beautiful Opéra was the *real* House of the Great Voice.

"And whatever my own may be—not Melba's, of course, for God is never good to people, I imagine, twice exactly alike—whatever mine may be, *I can put that other voice into it*—that voice that cries out for People from the walls of the Louvre!"

"I understand, Dulce!" cried Mrs. Rugg. "And I will help—oh, I will help! For you are *not* going to leave me! And I am so glad that we are right here in Paris, the most perfect place in the world for all such things—we will inquire and plan right away—we will begin to-morrow!"

But Dulce shook her head sadly.

"The reason I must leave you, Doña Rina, is because I must start all over again from the very beginning of the road where I started out wrong and bad before, to begin the work of all this. For the work is a terribly big, hard work, and I must start quickly. It is like a big pyramid that I must climb—or build—whichever way you choose to call it. I see now what the gypsy meant. Thank God I am clever, and have more brains than you might think; and as for mere *work*, I can do the hardest that could be thought of, and the greatest amount of it that could possibly be piled up for me, so long as it—so long as it is—is not what I used to do, Doña Rina—so long as I do not have to go to the—the Trudge Market any more!" Abrupt hot tears rolled down her face and Mrs. Rugg impulsively sprang to her and folded her in her arms.

"You never *shall* need to, dear! And why is this any reason that you should leave me? Remember how I *want* to help you, how I am *able* to help you!"

But though Dulce raised her hands to tighten the warm clasp of the arms about her, again she shook her head.

"No, dear, dear Doña Rina. It must be with no one's money—just by my own *work*. You have done enough—all that it was *meant* you should do. You have taught me better than ever before that women are good to women, and that has helped me to make a vow, that all my life I too will be good to women, as well as I know how. And I must not take your money, Doña Rina. What I make—and pay back—must be *utterly* of my own making."

"But," cried the distressed woman, instinctively seizing what straw of advantage she could from the tempest of the girl's hectic splendour of reasoning, "remember what you yourself said, Dulce, in Barcelona, that very first night, sweet and pitiful and amusing then, but tragic now if you repudiate it—that if I were in need, you would not *let* me be your maid, you would give, till I had won, and—and could pay back, which you did *not* say. How much greater *your* case to fight, dear Dulce, how much happier, afterward, your repayment! Be consistent—*dear!*"

"Ah, no, no, no, it is *not* the same case, dear Doña! Your very heart knows the nature of what there *already* is for me to repay! My Doña Rina, your heart *knows!*"

"But how *can* you do all of this alone, Dulce? How *can* you? How will you start—how, where?"

"I do not know how—yet. But it shall be at Cadiz."

"At Cadiz, Dulce? My dear, my dear, are you *quite* mad?"

"Perhaps. I shall see it all quite clearly, and that much I see now. I tramped out of Cadiz once on my wrong Gran Via, and I shall tramp in again to start my right one."

"Dulce, Dulce," pleaded the weeping woman, "how can it all end?"

"That, Doña Rina, even the gitana could not see. But I must start over from the very beginning, that much I know. I have money enough to get on the express to Madrid, and there I can work, and earn my fare down to Cadiz. A man was kind to me in Madrid once—yes, a *man*. He tried to stop me when—well, when I was hungry once. He will give me decent work, in a little oyster-shop that he keeps."

"But, Dulce, your wages—and the—the candlesticks and mantones——"

"No, Doña Rina. Besides all I truthfully said and felt about them, they are nothing to what you have given me. And you know well you paid my wages long ago, Doña Rina."

"But what shall I give you from myself, Dulce? I know you will take no money—will you take a jewel, Dulce? Any jewel I have?"

"I will take simply what you bought for me, Doña Rina, in your thoughtfulness, and when I was worrying you, too—the *Valse Brune*."

"Oh, Dulce; Dulce; you——"

"I will never forget you. I never *can*! But that will be a keepsake. Put your name on it. And your love for me—if you will. And that will be all."

"But you will write to me, Dulce? You will write?"

"It—is better not, I think. At first there would be only hard knocks to tell, and—I—I spell like the devil. Dear Doña, we shall meet again in the Gran Via. I *feel* it! There is so much fate in this, let fate attend to it all! That is how I feel, and I must start again *absolutely alone*, as if I were starting for the first time. I must!"

Again tears came to Dulce, blinding her. And in this moment of her passionate resolution her Doña, with all that was hers, and that ached in her possession to be given, fell powerless before it and had only tears to be able to give.

CHAPTER XXI

THE DISH OF SILVER

THE Mirage of Atlantis. . . .

The Queen of the Sea. . . .

The Garden of the Oceans. . . .

The Spanish Venice. . . .

Such is Cadiz, deserving all her list of names since first she was the prodigal daughter of Carthage—prodigal in wealth, more prodigal of luxury. . . .

Luxury in which Hannibal lolled while his fleet decked itself on the surrounding waters. . . .

Luxury in which Hamilca Barca, turning his back to his unhappy child Salamambo while she wove herself into the fatal meshes of Tanit's zaïmph at home in Africa, stood with his keen eyes appraising Cadiz's riches as Roman soldiers appraised her dancing-girls. . . .

Pompey and Cæsar quarrelled over her, as if they had been women and she what she then was called—the Polished Jewel. . . .

And as if the vast waters through which her shell-stone rises were not enough of deluge, history deluged her, again and again, with peoples:

Greeks. . . . Romans, naming her City of Venus. . . .

Arabs. . . . Moors, naming her Dish of Silver. . . .

And Spaniards, naming her every pretty thing that they could think of.

Rich she has been, and poor, and wiped out, and re-peopled, and forgotten, and famous again, swinging from fortune to fortune like the pendulum of a clock until she was entirely Spanish, and sank, not into the salt waters whence she sprang, but into languor, like a passionate woman satisfied and sleeping. . . .

And there she lies yet, dreaming, perhaps, of younger days and far-past loves, content, like her present nation, in memories of treasures that made her, even so late as when England lost her thirteen States, much richer, in mere money, than London!

Even now, shimmering out of the blue ocean against the blue sky in all the soft splendour of her white stone and Italian marbles, which climb inward from the very water's edge of low buttressed wall to the heart of her diminutive self, blending and hiding her many hues in one big gleaming white until, on close approach by ship or across her narrow causeway between the waves, she unveils her ageless beauty in fine pastel of pink and green and blue and gentle yellows, patterned with the dark grace of falling palms in rank and file and cluster, lies this dreaming city.

Alas for salt water, symbol of grief and symbol of calamity! yet all the salt water of the Atlantic has not washed away the poem Cadiz; and thus, in poet's own truth, she looks to-day, if to-day's sun is forth. . . .

Across the causeway, from the great peninsular on to the little one, home to this prodigal daughter a prodigal daughter returned, not with humility, yet with eyes furtive somewhat, for in the sea-wind she tasted the poignant-blowing breath of her nativity, which frightened her as she walked trembling into the fair sunlit Plaza of Isabel.

It was early morning, and she was hungry.

At Madrid, she had found that her old friend of the oyster-shop was no more—or anyway, there no more; he had gone into the Great Mystery of death, or else the still greater one of the life of a retired oyster-opener. And she had walked from the capital—the very centre of Spain—to Cadiz. . . . Months. . . .

Her latest money was nearly spent, but that was no new worry to her, and it was not at parting from them that she turned pale as she set out two coppers, at a wine-shop opposite the water-front, for some bread and a small glass of russet-coloured Amontillado. It was

because she had known, since she was no higher than the table, the friendly face of the old *hombre* who took the coins with a courteous "gracias" for the fraction bonus; and that he went away, unrecognizant, brought with the very pain of it a throb of thankful satisfaction.

Deeper in the city, at a shop near to the cathedral, she bought a fan for half a peseta, daring the face of the woman behind the counter. Again she was not known, though soap and lace and scent had met her coins here throughout former years; and confident now, and with a consequent little flutter of spirit, she bought a handkerchief too—though she noticed that it took her last *real*—to reinforce the fan in assisting her dingy costume, and went boldly into the streets again, and through them whereso she chose, unfearing—though she carefully did not choose the Rosario . . . where certain two old people used to live. . . .

Her purpose was set, and clear to her vision as a fish in crystal water, whether or no she might succeed in grasping it; but before the day's task, she had a pilgrimage to make, devout and exacting in this new vision of hers as any godly zealot's, and she pointed her steps, by way of the Paseo del Sur, to the Capuchin Convent. Having passed the vivid-coloured Shepherdess Virgin who sits in a glass case with her large straw hat, and having made a grave reverence to it for the warding nun's sake, she entered the sanctuary and stood, with all the devotion of a travelling foreigner, before the high altar, gazing up at the rich soft beauties of the "Betrothal of Saint Catharine" painted there.

All the miracle and wonder of the House of the Great Voice came back to her, sacred like a confirmation in her new understanding, her opened book. Here had Murillo lived, breathed, *worked*. Here on this very spot, he had stood, as she now stood, evening after evening as he made and made this thing, gazing up at his labour . . . until his own evening came and the fatal scaffold fell from

before it, this his last great deed, the scaffold that he had climbed smiling, martyrlike, for the life of the world's history, dashing him down to death as she might one day fall in her last song, in the last plunge of her *Gran Via*. . . .

"Murillo, Spanish like myself, ignorant, at the beginning, as myself, afterward living—and dying—in golden glories of his own making out of Spanish air, and Spanish colours and thoughts and emotions. . . . Gracias a Dios, there are more great Spaniards! . . . Thanks to God, there will be one more still!"

And with this solemn seriousness of inward speech, she paid the poor sweet-faced nun who tended not only the door but the insane in the abandoned convent, paid the waiting beggar in the courtyard, and was gone. Coppers, even the very last ones—how much they could pay for in Spain!

She was busy, afoot, for some hours, indefatigable in persistent inquiries here, there, and yonder, throughout the entire business part of town, but restricted to the scattered, buried little world of the *Teatro*; and quite early after midday she had a small fund of smaller talk that flushed her pale cheeks with nervous eagerness, and was hastening beyond the lovely Plaza de Loreto into the quietest district of the city.

For all its eagerness and momentary flush, that face, she realized with a pang, must prove little in her favour. She had caught sight of it in the cracked mirror of an eating-shop—where she had talked, not eaten—and had the broken symbol frightened her, which it certainly would have done, once, it could not have cast out a whiter face, a face more hungry, more changed, more written on of need, and pain, and unearthly, unyouthful queer-ness.

But she thrust away the fretting memory of it, and with set lips and resolute eyes marched into her street and approached a house letting into a small, dead-looking theatre.

At the door, however, sudden, overpowering timidity whelmed her, and she leant against the masonry beside it, thankful that the street was empty of eyes to see her daring or her cowardice. It was a very small street. Indeed, a very, very small street, a bakingly, shimmeringly sunlit street, very narrow, of yellow housewalls, all of them of delicate-coloured stucco, a street most noticeably secluded, solitary, quiet, not only because it was in the most unfrequented district of the town, an outskirt, or what might perhaps even better be called a *cotillon* of Cadiz, but because it was not just high noon, but higher noon, when it is far from well for folk to be out of doors. The one beside which Dulce drooped was small, but a matter of large decoration: twisted and beautifully tinted columns and overpiece, marvellously old, flanked and crowned its doorway as if this had sprung up from the street and must be kept within the right bounds of its place with as good looks as possible, and making a sole and unconscious advertisement for the lost little theatre by their show of fair pastel colours and lovely gracefulness of carven lines in the otherwise unbroken cream-hues of the curving street.

To a happy person, the whole environ would have murmured the word "Peace." To Dulce, it said "Need!" with all the force of the sunlight, the sharp brilliance of diamonds to the starving; and herself murmuring "Mi Dio! Mi Dio!" yet calling not upon God but upon a god lately hers, the nameless, glittering god that had seemed to shine down upon her in the convent of the pitiful insane, she straightened back her drooping shoulders and reached her hand toward the door.

But her hand did not reach it. Instead, it reached her hand, bruising it and sweeping nearly by her face, as though it had been hurled open by blind fury; and Fury itself, not blind, but with eyes ablaze, and hot lips cursing, issued into the street in a fat Spanish woman, who was dressed in *chic* mourning and whose powder was damp and red with rage.

"Saint Catharine! Saint Margaret! Saint Mary Magdalen! Saint Hell!" she cried, and fell upon Dulce as if the pale girl had been her hope, her friend, her sister, and her husband.

"They are devils, devils, when I have spent eighteen dollars for my costumes! And they call me fat, *fat!* Saint Swill! Do you think I was not fat when they engaged me?"

"Señorita," said Dulce softly, judging her to be a señora, "I assure you I am sorry for the injustice, for I am a very sympathetic girl; and besides, I heard gossip all over, this morning, of their brutality to you, and that you would be no woman of spirit if you stood much more!"

"And I will not!" cried the diva. "Let me tell you, I have resigned every single day, and this time I mean it! Do you believe me?"

Dulce seemed shocked.

"I would believe nothing else of any *lady!*" she said. "Is there any little service I could do for you?"

"Yes. Go up and cut their throats for me!" cried the diva.

"Well, I will do my best as to that, be sure, for I have come to see the wicked things on business," said Dulce. "Are you *truly* leaving them? Surely they will send for you back again!"

"If they ask for my direction," exclaimed the large singer, "tell them to go to purgatory, for that is where they *told* me to go, and therefore, naturally, where they will not find me! Thanks to God, I have spoiled their opening for them here, if no further, for there is certainly no one else like me in Spain, and it would not surprise me if they took the boat back to Italy to-night, when one is sailing, and picked some Neapolitan out of the gutter. Are you looking for chorus? They are devils, girl, but I wish you luck. If they go on at all without me, they will need you and more!"

"You will make a great gap, I am sure!" said Dulce.

"And if your voice is as pretty as your face, you must be a charming singer! What a pity for them to let you leave! What is the matter with them?"

"Bad temper, the shameless devils!" cried the cantatriz. "I never knew such tempers! The Maestro is different, and appreciated my demands. He is an angel! But I am a lady of ideas and character, and in the confusion he could not pacify us. He understands music, but the other two——!" And she broke off to her saints again, and from them to a kindly repeated: "Good luck, girl!"

"Thank you," said Dulce, and they kissed, and the diva rolled noisily down the street.

"Now," thought Dulce, turning again toward the house, "either luck indeed or those saints of hers must have been with me to get me here at such a moment! And in this starving town of all places, and at the very first throw!" And this happy philosophy carried her bruised hand in a joyous little gesture toward the door again. But if, after the wicked way of thinking of the East, God's finger is fate, and one that writes history before it happens with its nail, then Dulce must have been set down beforehand not to pass the beautifully scroll-columned door of the pretty yellow stuccoed house, for even as she thus reached again, again it opened, and hubbub as large as the large lady's burst forth from back of it—nor was this quite a miracle, for the sum-total-equal of her clamour was here made up by a triumverate of excitable: a Jew, a Catalonian, a musician.

These three very doubtful parts of speech, in their extravagant haste, seemed to have seized one another and leapt down the stairs like brotherly suicides, or else to have been pushed off by some sane person with a rude sense of humour at the top; but having arrived strangely upright in the street, they stopped as short as their noise, and as though dazzled by the sun-shimmer—as indeed they were, for the fierce power of high noon was now, at two o'clock, still uppermost, together with the added

bake of those hundred and more minutes since the meridian. But their daze was further and more haplessly due to the fact that the little street was so curved that its vistas closed in near at either hand, and the direction taken by their diva was thus harder to know than if she had fluttered upward to the sky. Even there the Jew's eyes sought her, and in coming worldward again they encountered Dulce. In the same moment his two companions noticed her.

"Well," demanded one, "what do *you* want here?" It was the Catalanian, and Dulce knew at once, now that his voice rose free of the mutual outcry, that though Spanish, he was no Andalusian, for the quick, ragged speech held harsh traces of the north. Nor were his comrades natives of Cadiz, for this figure nearest her, she saw, was a Spaniard but a Jew, dark-bearded with his skin of olive showing through, and with white teeth and black eyes that could all bite; the third, as obvious of context, was Latin, but no Spaniard—a Neapolitan, she decided, long and narrow and white of face, with looping thick black hair and deep fire-flecked brown eyes that were lit with childish curiosity—the Maestro, Dulce decided further, for his hands were slender and nervous, and twitched all the while as if their flesh sought keys to play or times to beat.

"Work," she had answered, before she had thought all this, for which she had ample pause after her prompt monosyllable, as it had thrown the Jew and the Catalanian into fresh astonishment, and her gaze had held the inquisitive brown eyes of the long thin childlike musician.

"Well? Well?" cried the Jew impatiently at last, and the first questioner, a man of business apparently, showed his authority and bore out the Jew with a quick addition to his angry word:

"Chorus?"

"Yes, if not a part," said Dulce.

"Part?" cried the man contemptuously. "Come, do

not waste our time! Can you sing? Say what you can do and what you have done!"

"I have been in the chorus once. For several nights, at the Alcázar in Barcelona."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"And you bother us, with no more to offer?"

"It is useless," interposed the Jew. "We need some chorus. But we need experience, or looks, or both, if we can get them. What we need most now is pretty girls."

"I am very pretty," said Dulce.

At his incredulous stare her voice became impatient.

"I should know, should I not? For I have been with myself all my life, and you have been far away from me till this minute—thank heaven! And let me tell you that when I am in spirits I am one of the prettiest girls in Spain. Prettier at any rate than any Frenchwoman. I have just been in Paris, and I *know*!"

The two men looked at each other, and despite their rising anger, began to laugh. The Maestro, though nearer to a child's mind than either of them, did not even smile.

"Go away! Go away!" said the Jew. "If you faced an audience, they would let you know your looks!"

"They would laugh!" said the business man.

"They would weep!" said the Jew.

As she turned the despised face away to hide its pain, she heard a third voice—a quiet and gentle one.

"Well, friends, could you ask anything more than that, in an actress?"

It was the voice of the Maestro, calm and serious, with a touch of startling demand in it; and Dulce, with a swift grateful glance at him, boldly turned her tears, which were now brave and angry ones, upon the two.

"Exactly! And while you used up time insulting me, you were preventing my telling you that not only am I

clever but I have a perfectly wonderful, beautiful voice besides!"

The Jew and the Catalanian were dividing their new astonishment between Dulce and the Maestro, who now spoke again with soft, quick words.

"It is your decision as well as mine, my friends. But can you not see my point? The girl has comedy and tragedy, and the figure shows that only in the face is she thin like me! What she said was funny, like the clown, though she was angry, like a serious part! I could have laughed at your faces, señores, while she was talking! So would the people, sometimes, at hers, while she was singing, but they would laugh with a tear, if her voice sings as it talks! And she says the voice is fine, friends. Shall we try it, no? It might be for the señora's part!"

The Jew gasped, but the business man was silent. The Maestro turned to Dulce, who at his last words had begun to tremble, with a great sickening, joyous heart-leap. She felt faint at the resurge of it, in which her mind seemed swimming—desperately swimming, for she knew that she must not pay this Jew and this out-Heroding Jew, a Catalanian, one tithe of facial joy, yet she must speak, and speak quickly, for the Maestro stopped silent, waiting for her. And the instant before she could grasp assurance and push it into her voice seemed endless to her. Starvation was at the bottom of her second's cavernous weakness, starvation that she had not thought about, weakness at which she passingly wondered, in the lightning-flash thought of the drowning. Then words leapt to her mind, her tongue; her elbow swinging her hand to her hip with the jaunty slap of a *bolero*. She pretended to have been sulking instead of fainting, and with a little pout she looked at the Jew and the business man.

"As a matter of fact, I am a very great singer—by nature, so to speak, and out of luck at the moment, which is luck for you, but with a wonderful future, as this charming Italian gentleman recognized. He, you see, is

intelligent, while you two are everything that fat woman probably called you!"

The closing impoliteness of her speech was purposeful, and intelligently so, for she knew her Jew and her Catalanian, and meant her words as the needed lash to dogs in the danger-moment when they do not know robber from mistress. But the whip she had chosen was unfortunate. She should have thrown any crushing thing at them rather than their lost prima donna.

"Which way did she go?" demanded the business man.

"Yes," cried the Jew instantaneously, "which way? That is a devil, but that is also a nice big woman!"

As she heard the echo of her blunder, and a great rushing weight seemed to sink down through her, dragging her heart after it, the Maestro spoke swiftly. It was as if a current from her sensation had reached and urged him.

"Yes, friends, very much of a nice woman—*too* much, if you are wise, and if this girl can sing!"

Her heart leapt again, almost deathly in its dizzy reaction after reaction; but the ragged-voiced northerner spoke abruptly, concisely—suddenly redolent of his geography as a bit of pink earth from the Catalanian Plain.

"No! I have decided! I like decisions! We must find her! But we will give up this dirty town all covered with water. Whether we find her or not, we will go to Italy to-night. She is not too big for Italy—in Italy they listen, they do not look. And in two hours we must have our tickets!"

"But," cried the Jew, "can we find her in two hours? It was two hours last time! Can we this time?"

"We know her habits!" said the business man, tritely. "We can do it in just two hours, this time—if we know which way she started!"

"Yes," cried the Jew, "we both know her nice large habits! If we know which way! Which way did she go?"

And they both turned upon Dulce, as thoughtless of her, save for their important purpose, as if they had never encountered her:

"Which way? Which way?"

Droop-shouldered, she was standing in their midst like a stopped mechanism, a thing lately animate, of which some vital part had deadened. The troublous heart had ceased to hamper her, as if after its mad ricochetting it had found the place it had sought—somewhere outside her. Her mind, instead of it, was madly racing—in a hot course of logic so lightning-swift that its vivid flash showed her even the calmly smiling irony of her moment.

She knew, now, that for days she had been too hungry. She knew that if she did not earn her next bread, she must beg it. She knew—for she knew every cobblestone in Cadiz—that one direction of the little street led into a quarter likely to twist their noses into a circuitous whirl that might send them twice around the city. She knew that her answer was a little answer between herself and God, and that if she lied only He and herself would know it. The two horrid voices of the Catalonian and the Jew, for in their simplicity they never thought of her opportunity, nor even saw at all the battle in her eyes, were still rasping in her ears, with growing impatience pressing her.

"Do you not hear us?" . . . "Which way?"

With a little catch in her breath, she raised her arm.

"That way," she said, and pointed in the correct direction.

And the two were gone before her arm had dropped heavily against her side from its gesture—gesture such as a soul might use in deliberately sending itself to hell and someone else's to heaven.

Her head sank slowly forward, and she stood like a wax figure that had begun to melt in the sunshine.

The long, childlike Italian came up behind her and laid a thin hand gently, with a pitying little pat, on one of

the drooping shoulders. His deep, queerly vibrant voice spoke as one understanding nature to another.

"Remember the great Roman singer who is now the world's sensation. *She* started in the street—selling flowers!"

Dulce, after a shiver, staring ahead of her answered huskily.

"*I* started in the street—selling something different!"

He turned helplessly away and disappeared back into the little theatre, his shrug and headshake and racial casting out of hands all together in one motion saying in Latin wordlessness, "I am sorry!"

Alone in the brilliantly yellow street, she shrank back to the stucco wall of the building and leant against it. Quite all strength was not gone from her, but the last was going, seeming to seep away as some tangible thing, as tears, might do, drop by drop, eaten up by the heat of the street—heat as hungry for tears as she was for food. Her eyes and face downcast, her cheek against the wall, she seemed to speak to the sidewalk:

"It began here. Perhaps it is to end here."

And slowly, unresistingly, for she knew resistance to be unavailing now, she sank down, down, scratching the white cheek—and at the pain of it, her only defensiveness an impulse of her hands back of her, as long ago against the slippery windows of the Royal—till she was a sick mass of crazy clothes and listless flesh huddled upon the baking pavement, her fresh, pretty fan and handkerchief now ridiculous patches of cleanliness standing out upon what might readily have been a pile of refuse left by the surge of life upon immaculate Cadiz.

Cumulative exhaustion from the long journeying, from Barcelona through the North, and back, and to Paris, and back, back, back, like a creature on a string, the physical miles and the spiritual tramp of it, at last in one abrupt defiance from abused body and recklessly expended soul, had whelmed and overwhelmed her. That the soul is not inexhaustible she had not known till now, and now she

knew, and knew with the despairing conviction that the lesson had been taught at the hopeless and bankrupting cost of finality. She knew that this *should* not be the end—even of this episode; that she still might plead her cause for the mere little chorus part which was all, after all, for which initially she had come. But intuition, so slow and seldom to discover good news, so strangely given to the pointing of ill, told her that even this she could not now secure, that having refused the big they would refuse the little; that this *was* the end, not alone of this, but of all dream-materials, for life itself seemed to swim madly before her, instead of standing clear, and upright, and normal—and life thus distorted is of the nature of death.

But there was still enough of conscious living in her for her mind to form a thought, and for her lips to move, if not for sound to come from them, and as her whole being had so long been a protest, she protested now—not against God—*any* god—but to Him, and against annihilation. Dulce lifted up her wretched eyes; and prayed.

“Holy God, I have been impolite to You sometimes. Indeed, in some of my thoughts I have been quite—quite—hateful about You, which I think is quite likely just the opposite of Your own character. Holy God, if You ever did miracles, You can still do them, and I think from the way I feel that I need a miracle now, that there are no miracles left in myself to trudge ahead with, and that if I am to tramp one step further it is time for a little one from You. Indeed, no matter what, it would seem very big to me—any little miracle that would keep me, till I am strong again, in both food and—decency. Oh, if You only would, I—Oh, Holy God, I do not wish to seem as if I were trying to make a—a bargain with You, but the idea is in my thoughts by instinct, and I might as well be truthful to You, and if You will only do some big-little thing now when I need it so, I will try always after this to be very respectful to You and

about You, and, no matter what it might be, yes, *no matter what*, no matter where it might lead me, nor what terrible pain it might bring afterwards, if You chose, I would pay it cheerfully, and not complain, so You sent it now, when I need it so, I promise You!"

The silent prayer, with its pitiful spirit of covenant, was as if written for God by the moving lips instead of spoken, and therefore not so soon in reaching Him, for the little street stopped there surrounding her as soundless in its ultra heat as the petition in its ultra longing, and her look and face, after an instinctive glance to each side, sank again toward the merciless pavement. A confused noise sounded in her ears. It was like conflicting voices, and she thought it an effect of her starvation—God's only answer. But it died away, and a moment afterward, startlingly clear in its closeness to her, a single, and moreover a singular and a sweet voice spoke.

"Are—are you ill?"

Dulce looked up, and as if the automatic action of mind upon body were more powerful than purpose, even purpose of prayer, a little sound escaped her—like a queer little ghost of sound, but still an articulate sound, so fragrant of miracle was the vision that met her vision. It was, in fact, only a young girl, human and frailly human, who, beset by voluble Cadizian guides, had escaped them and their importuning clamour a moment since into the seeming solitude of the little street. But in the thoughts that had framed Dulce's desperate little petition to sovereign Power there had been literal, trite pictures so very natural to ideas of that Power and its attributes—flashing thoughts of angels when her dry lips spelled "miracle"; and the lovely creature before her now looked like an angel to her drinking eyes, for to Dulce's mind, forever the sensitively imaginative artist-mind, the beautiful girl was entirely of heavenly colours—white, and pink, but only most delicately pink, and gold, sun-gold, as if her soft hair were a halo, and, in some

matter or manner, silver, yes, silver, even if this seeming were only from her voice, which was of a high though so quiet *timbre*, strange and unaccustomed to Dulce, and which spoke again.

"Yes, you—you *are* ill! You must let me help you!"

There was a hesitant distress in the chiming words.

Dulce did not answer. She could not—as yet, though she was gathering strength to do so, gathering it straight and fulsomely from the exquisite presence before her. She simply gazed, and the girl gazed back at her, her eyes pitiful, fascinated and horrified, but quite unwavering through her little space of continued hesitancy as to what she should say next, or do. It seemed to Dulce, as her mind cleared itself of mystical imaginings, that as the girl *was* of earth, not heaven, her loveliness and her tints were of the most perfect and supreme of earthly things—namely, flowers. In her whiteness, and the dull green of her gown, she was like a slender lily standing there, bending a little—the very flower of rapturous sacredness, of prayer. The fair, troubled, gazing eyes were, by inevitable thought, forget-me-nots. And in truth, in this long extraordinary moment something deep, and significant, and poignant beyond that moment's situation and its needs, was passing between these two most opposite creatures, for Dulce's open-mouthed worship of such pure beauty constituted a heavy tribute of frankincense that no mere passing service to a pauper would equalize, and the girl, on her part, knew, as deeply innocent and pure natures feel and know in the presence of the deathly or the terrible, that she was gazing, through the rich dark eyes that stared up at her, upon a naked, shivering, and bleeding soul.

One of her hands had unconsciously reached toward, without quite touching, Dulce. It was not that she consciously, or unconsciously, shrank, although she was like virginity itself leaning over this squalid discard of the street. She had by instinct started to lift her up, and by instinct paused to think what to do with her. Angels

can afford to steep their hands in filth and to lower their wings in mud, for their whiteness is fairer, their rainbow hues are more brilliant for every such encounter.

With such whiteness and such brilliance gathered into her gazing soul and thence, in a faint reflection, into her voice, Dulce spoke.

"It—it is a strange matter, your speaking to me, señorita! More strange than you can think. Women, one after another, are forever coming up behind me—or before me, in your case!—with help to offer. Just when God is most absent-minded about one, it is strange that women should not be!"

"Perhaps, girl, God is in everything—even women," said the girl softly.

"Ah," cried Dulce, and a cry it was, for the voice was stronger now, and it was beautiful with earnestness, "you are right, right! He is in *you—that* I know! Oh, I had just asked Him for a miracle, and it—you—came, and I had made Him a promise, and with my first breath when He answered me I broke it! But I did not mean to, and I tell Him again now I *never* will, *really!* Oh——" and by now she had struggled to her feet, the beautiful girl assisting, steadying her—"if you would help me, though this is my native town of which I know every stone, and you are a stranger, whom I should welcome and help, could you give me, or get me, some work?"

"*Work?*" exclaimed the girl. "You are sick, *sick!* Wait——" And she propped her into the corner of the theatre doorway. "I was very cross just now to some guides, and now I need one!" And she ran to the corner around which she had escaped the importunates and called "Man! Man!" the "Hombre, Hombre," tinkling from her like an excited little bell. "*That* one—you—the *big* one! You, yes, *you!*" And she ran swiftly back.

To Dulce, the man who followed her looked like some figure in a dream, and indeed he was so huge that one neither ill nor imaginative might have gasped at him, a monster of humanity resplendent in its mere lumbering

size, and so gorgeous in colours, both of labourer's costume and of golden and olive visage, that he might have stood with noble appropriateness for the Nation's portrait. His vast shadow swept along the yellow house-fronts and seemed to swallow, like a wave, both Dulce and her exquisite Samaritana as the girl turned to him.

"Lift this girl up! Carry her to the Hotel de Francia!"

"The de Francia!" murmured Dulce as he swept her like a shadow itself into his arms and holding her like a light fabric across them lifted her to what seemed to her a dizzy height. "In the Plaza de Loreto! Oh, two streets lead into it—one is the Rosario! Oh, make me the favour to go in by the right-hand street! There—there are ghosts in the Rosario!"

"Hush, hush!" said the beautiful girl, soothingly. "We will not go by the Rosario—do you hear, man?"

"Gracias!" gasped Dulce, and "Work!" she whispered as she swooned in the huge arms that bore her forward in their strange little caravan. "Work! Something to do!"

CHAPTER XXII

A FLOWER OF THE ENGLISH SUN

FULL of soft shadows and curtain-filtered sunlight, the big room seemed brooding as a person might brood in the drowse that seems by nativity itself to hang like some fair and delicate nostalgia over Spain in the hours of long spoke-like solar rays that follow the actual siesta hour. Grant shadow, and air will respond to the call of the senses throughout any time in little oceanic Cadiz, and this chamber was cool as it was spacious and Spanish—though it was Spanish very simple and Spanish very recent, for as drawing-room of the most expensive suite in the de Francia it had been furnished as if, rather, to emulate the dignified but trite hotel *patio* from whose galleries it let off: a certain elegance with the quality in quotation marks marked the room; its grand piano was more grand than piano, and palms—truly beautiful palms—flanked the pre-eminent and, because of its weight, the irremediable position of this; and over against the lovely lace curtains of the tall French balcony-windows, as if intentionally to set them afire, was a most hideous, most inhuman equipage, designed in fulsome hardware as an ideal representation of humanity and beauty—a plaster, Habana-turbanned negress, life-size as far as she went, which was fortuitously only to her bosom, smiling from coast to coast, and holding at the end of a décolleté arm a cigar with a gas-jet in it.

Then there were some beauties sheer and perfect in the dim airy room—on the piano, in a crystal-like bowl, and lusciously harmonizing with the deep drooping green of the regimental palms, a mass of rich violets; in a low

chair near the closed-out little balcony, the girl, so human yet so kindred to the angels, who had saved Dulce's life, or reason, or perhaps both, or anyway so Dulce thought, a week ago.

For a week had passed, and a strange week, vague, like a fantasy, yet vivid, and never to be forgotten, for these two extraordinarily opposite creatures. Two bedrooms opened off this grandiose parlour, and Dulce was in one of these—sleeping, the girl thought, but she was not sleeping. Dulce was well now, or—again—thought she was, and insisted so as emphatically as she did that she had been saved from true calamity, from “the end,” a sad end of some kind if not the great weird adventure death, by her new chance friend, her “miracle-friend.”

“Friend” was a marked and a great word between them—it had happened to become so, several days ago.

That Dulce was well, or nearly so, but the one step of intervening nerve-weakness away from as excellent health as could appropriately be for such a mind and temperament as hers when without conscious progress in their soul purposes, was a fact due to that interim's tender care, and less to that care itself than to that tenderness of it, which she had drunk in like an instinctive economist, a swiftly recognizant opportunist, as a life-giving property, without heed to its reason or circumstances, and to show gratitude for afterward, with all the strength accrued from it. And it was without stint or question, that it was given. What the girl had seemed that day and that long communicative moment in the street, when Dulce had gazed up with thoughts of godly magic into the turquoise eyes, she not only had continued to seem, but was, and continued to be.

Early, in the periods of delirium, as logical an outcome of that vulgar ailment starvation as of its refined companion-trouble, a teased and over-striving mind, when sombre fragments of the tossing history thus temporarily

culminating murmured from the strange patient or gusted cruelly from her in louder, less moaning words, there had been for the ministering girl, by no means inconsistently with her suffering for her suffering guest, a pitying yet thralling fascination.

Before the only radical departure of her serene life had fetched her to Spain, this girl had dreamed of Spain. It had been her Land of Dreams, and, in them, not a mere land of castles. Although—or perhaps because—she was scarcely older than Dulce, and by count of living and suffering enormously younger, she had clairvoyance—the clairvoyance of supreme chastity and supreme inexperience, and to her Spain far off had grown so real that sometimes she had told herself: “Without having seen, I think I can see it all: By such intensity of sunlight, its colours are crude, by such density of shadows, its figures are grotesque; but within the colours is softness, within the figures, reality. That land possesses horror, fear, joy, romantic love. Its soul is sinister, inevitable—and gay. Nemesis is that soul’s guardian. If it took on the figure of a girl, she would be a dancing girl. But I see her, too, among tones that are mostly very grey and blue—moving against a high, oppressive wall, and again, I see her near the earth—that gaunt, hungry, isolated Spanish clay.”


Now, having in so swift and so extraordinary a way known Dulce, and having been to her, even so briefly, what mothers and fathers sometimes cannot be to their children, she might have said to her, had she chosen to express the thought: “If I go no further, look no more, I *have* seen it all.”

For to her, Dulce was that girl-figure, the Soul of Spain. The fair girl’s vision was now a living, breathing, pulsating thing, beginning with the vital activity of that big hot tableau in the little shimmering street when the guide had been like a giant sketch of Spain’s coloured Sierras sweeping up toward succour her frail and battered offspring, and since filled out and out with picture

and picture, first from those fierce and sometimes terrible phases of delirium, and later, with the nearer and nearer approach to lucidity and then the full regainment of a clear mind, from Dulce's deliberate speech—given always with a bewitching reticence to this spotless listener, yet trenchant, too, from her insistent honesty; so that with very, very little actually told, the girl knew virtually, rather than practically, all, and saw it as she might have seen a painting, comprised of a series of paintings, wherein were places without names, yet vivid by means of sharp scenes, little vistas, and people without histories, but the more fully human by thus seeming to represent just elements, feelings.

Dulce and Dulce's story stretched before her mind as something richly similar, perhaps, to America's wondrous possession, the Gobelin tapestries of Don Quixote. But, for the tints, faint tones, of this treasure, were substituted a mysterious dimness of connecting background, against which stood forth almost vehement brilliances of episode and of significances, of which the sunlight, doubly tense and yellow by force of shadows, was Sorolla's, and of which the things of shadow, doubly deep and ominous from the sunlight, were Zuloaga's. Some of these shadows, even El Greco, and certainly Goya, might have painted, so full of ghosts were they—as when she spoke again, in her delirium, of the little street of the Rosary so near to them, and of the old people formerly there whom she imagined to have cursed her, while sometimes into the sharp sunlight would creep a little soft golden haze, in some disconnected aspirational words of reaching after unborn art or of yearning over still-born love, that Murillo might have had a hand in.

And to the nursing, gently resuscitating "miracle-friend," Dulce had become in turn a miracle, even before the depth and lodestone of their accidental contact had resolved themselves into recognizance, and been expressed, and become *new* history—a miracle that she cherished for its nature, shudder as she had sometimes to shudder at



some of the faces of the new facets of life turned to her.

Nor were the beautiful girl's care and labour a matter of entire ease, of the charity—or love—brought a little bit this side the stars by the fact of being without sacrifice. Though she was her own mistress, and had proven it unnumbered times these seven days, though she was theoretically and technically free to pursue this somewhat Quixotic windmill-tilt of hers in the dear Spain of her now fulfilled imagination, she was not free by any means as Doña Rina had been, not able to undertake it and proceed with it without encountering other mills of a wilder and a more windmillish kind.

For the flower-like creature was indeed accompanied by, and possibly derived a part of her exquisite flower effect from contrast with, every conceivable growth and luggage of trite conventionality, and her Accompanying Relative, a matron all in capitals, had, at the entrance of the caravan, risen, astounded, as she was quite natural and right in doing and being; and then, less literally but quite as actively had risen more; and more; and more, to heights, dizzying heights to observe, of motion, emotion, intonation.

This lady was handsome, with a certain classical, horse-like handsomeness that implies a flattered youth and excuses much, or she would have been appalling, and in fact she was considerably appalling anyway. With a Titanic and unconscious strength, she carried England about with her everywhere she went, and her exclusive Island soul abhorred the soul of the Peninsular. She did not love Dulce, either instantly or gradually, and she could not understand why any member of her family suddenly should.

She said this, which was not at all unreasonable. And she also said that she could not understand why a heathen, a pagan, a Catholic, a guttersnipe, a gypsy, should be fetched from the entrails of an unheard-of town, and thrust into her bed. She said that people did not do

such things, that the Church of England did not prescribe the cleansing and burnishing of sewers as a part of the casual Christian duty of gentlewomen. She said that it was her young relative's romantic notions that had brought them to this heinous country in the first place, just as it had been ridiculous sentimental nonsense of that young relative's that had made her study Spanish, and that she hoped that when she married, which she further prayed would be extremely soon, she would find, as decent, normal, English people found, that life was *not* romance; and that if, in the meantime, she must act like a book, to let it be, for God's sake, a *clean* book, by the Duchess, and not a rude volume by Zola. She said that she now regretted every day, hour, minute of the weeks they had foolishly waited on this gruesome polka-dot in the sea for a telegram before starting home for England, and that she would forthwith start for England, alone if necessary; that the perennial madness in the family was not in her side of it, but that as it had broken forth with violence in her fair kinswoman's having gone forth alone that afternoon, and was probably contagious, she might as well be raving mad herself at once, and would herself go out alone, and sit on the boat until it sailed—on the *front* of the boat, where she could at least look forward to England. And she had lunged toward her hat, a hat entailing gestures, and had gone out, alone.

And this she had done every successive day, except one, the one, as it happened, when the boat unexpectedly sailed and another, convenient for her as a Cleopatra's barge, had taken its place in the *Báhia*.

Under the girl's delicate, almost sacred exterior, there must have been something of a nun's almost stubborn resistant power, for none of the volcanic speech each day and various times a day before the daily exit, words and action suggesting both Hercules and Herculanum, had for one instant swerved her, while to all of it she gave only gentle rejoinder or, failing strength for that, equally

gentle silence—until to-day, when the put-upon aristocrat had at the apex of clamour called Dulce a Papist and an Anarchist. And a little exhausted reproach had crept into the girl's voice and sounded in her supremely simple protest:

"Aunt! Aunt!"

"Niece! Niece! Niece!" cried her aunt. "O-o-o-oh, if we had only gone to the Riviera!"

And with this euphonious but unscientific co-ordination of thought she plunged for the hat, an action now as polished and perfect as anything to be seen at the bullfight.

If this hat was not made of fur, and feathers, and cloth, and bows of ribbon, and embroidery, and glass fruit, and cotton flowers, and velvet foliage, it seemed to be, on this hot day, it was so unmistakably a hat, and so round, and detailed, and cumulative. And she went to the boat.

Thus the girl was alone in the big brooding room, and thinking Dulce asleep, was resting—for sometimes Dulce had slept even through these matters—happily for her even comparative peace of mind, stirred, as it was, at best, by the situation of which she was the unhappy—yet happy—cause.

Yet, only a moment after to-day's start for the boat, Dulce came into the bedroom doorway, and stood framed by it—like a portrait, an uplifted hand against the frame, and gazing at her friend.

The girl reclining in her low chair did not yet see her. And Dulce saw, at its full and in this quiet light, and set off suggestively by the green graceful palms and purple massive violets, the beauty that had seemed heavenly to her, and come to her as from heaven, a week ago this moment, and perhaps more perfect now than at any moment of her consciousness since: the broad, low brow, white to the inevitable thought of serenity, and minutely veined as lily-petals, between the fine-spun, slightly curling hair of positively sunlight-colour, and the slender

cheeks, again wax-like and white as lily-cups yet with hints of faintly tinted rose-petals; the lips, like an opening and deeper-coloured rose; the straight, short nose, the blue and very long-lashed eyes; the slender, very slender body, naiadesque, and dressed again in delicate green; and somewhere with it all, seeming to hover about, impalpably, still that winging impression of silver, which would seem palpable, a colour with the other colours, as soon as her voice was heard, brook-like with its rising and falling liquid inflections—a voice which, like the wondrous complexion, was a product of her peculiar, damp-climated island nativity, that of the sharp, blond-producing North made fecund by the whim of the gracious Gulf Stream. She was entirely sylvan, while so unmistakably the result, indelible, of the intensively, cultivated racial.

And her soul was like her, her life was like her, beautiful. She would presumably have always, as she had always had, a happy, peaceful life; for she was of such a nature that even when Great Sorrow would—as he would—stand near her, she would not know it. He would pass her by quite as if he were a darkened ship, blinded by her beauty on the sea—because close as she would be to him he would turn his face away from her, made pitiful by her beauty. She would take Sorrow into her very house; but she would never know the name of her guest.

Such is the impregnable armour of unconscious saints. For to know that she gave pain, inevitable, deep pain, to some loved fellow-being, would have been utterly, irrevocably destructive to her. The most trenchant of all professed readers of the human heart, most epicureanly precise of all painters of the mysterious human mind, has written that fine temperaments, without fine surroundings, cease to exist. This is absolutely true. And given the circumstance of known sorrow from herself to one she loved, a kindred phenomenon would have occurred upon this girl. The most sordid environment would not have altered her—she would have altered it. But certainty that she could represent pain, that she comprised it, would

constitute for her a bitter setting of the whole world, and would in some sort kill her, for change by its very nature is gradual death, just as it is immediate life, and she would thereupon become so replete a thing of sorrow herself that she would no longer possibly be Isabel.

That was her name, from her mother, a rare patrician Isabella who thought, perhaps, the rich, sweet old-fashioned title too staidly regal for the delicious blossom the girl from her babyhood had been, and had altered it to its crystalline form at her happy christening.

All this spiritual signification of Isabel and her nature Dulce had not analytically discerned, yet had felt, and was feeling again, more than ever poignantly, now, as she gazed, and was sensitively, fulsomely appreciating, through, in turn, her own clairvoyance—a clairvoyance quite different from Isabel's, that, namely, of all women who have known passion, save some clodden few who can drink fire without tasting it.

But it was with the lovely name that her conscious thoughts were chiefly engaged, while this, again, was not the subject of her first words. Almost hating to stir the fair pensive tableau, she said softly:

"You said to me I might put on this pretty dress!"

With a little start, of surprise, and a second one, of sheer pleasure at the unexpected, doorway-framed picture, the girl turned, and returned her gaze.

Pale a little, and the dark eyes, dark hair thus a little darker, more mysterious; weak just a little, so that the posture, from the uplifted hand against the frame, held just a trace of totally unaware appeal; and in this lacily delicate gown of Isabel's, she was a supreme metamorphosis of the drearily garbed body and hungrily staring soul of a week ago. All that eager soul was there, but it now came forth from the eyes shining with hope and faith instead of glittering with despair; and in the supposedly simple frock, in which she had earnestly striven to look, and thought she did look, exceedingly—Cadizianly—"neat," and "clean," she was instead an

epitome of piquing, half-buoyant, half-languorous, negligent femininity. The dress was half-low necked; its colour, like Isabel's cheeks, was waxen lily-white, with a suggestion, just a suggestion, of colour-of-rose-petal. It was indeed an ostensibly simple frock, most simple. But it was Isabel's—and it had a grace, a fugitive elegance, an intention, that visualized titled sempstresses named Lilith, Rosamund, and probably Lallaga. And without the faintest thought of genius, Dulce had taken from their soft little balbriggan bag and hung around her neck the long string of Astarte beads—simply because their colours in the sunlight were like those of Isabel's eyes, and this fact she meant to mention.

Thus around her neck, in the daylight, and moreover the daylight of this room at this moment, their colours were almost faint, they were so tender, unassertive, and chalk-like, as if they were only a thought that had been put into material expression with pastels. They might have been composed mainly of exceedingly old blues and most diluted greens, with here and there several small pottery ones standing forth in dull, literal purple, to accentuate the contented delicacy of all the rest.

To those eyes that were enough like turquoises to resemble them, Isabel's eyes, Dulce now was still, as in the foreign girl's fantastic, panoramic vision of her, the Soul of Spain, but, by her changed and diverse mood and raiment, that soul in a still further phase and sphere.

And truly as she stood thus in the framing doorway as upon the threshold of some new and spirit-intriguing episode, only one Spanish artist, living or dead, and he Spain's most debauchedly romantic, could have sufficiently painted her—Fortuny. And he would probably, if possible, have rushed back from heaven, chancing hell over again, to do it—and instantly, before she could budge from her position. The long gaze between these two would have supplied his subject, with its quality of the imminent to fill his ubiquitous need of the engaging. The high, light colours of Isabel's beauty and that beauty

itself would have weighted with him to the measure of a whole crowd of meticulous figures in any costume-period. The palms, the violets, and the tall French windows, which he would have hurled open to let in the delicately scrolled balcony and a flood of gold, were literally there to his taste as to his hand. And over against his centering crescendo—Dulce—the big grotesquerie of the grinning plaster negress, disseminated through his medium into a myriad suggestions and shadowy potentialities, would have nearly satisfied—for once—his completely insatiable imagination. Finished, he would have done what he probably always longed to do and that as presumably his art had never let him do because he had never actually seen it, though he had hunted for it travelling as a child through the Catalonian hills with his tinted puppet-show as had Dulce with the drama hidden inside her—a co-ordinated and concrete dream of Spain and Venice, Paris, and the tropics.

She stepped from the framing doorway and came across to Isabel. In their long look of exchanged admiration, each quite unconscious of it in the other, her pretty speech about the pretty dress had been forgotten, forgotten, too, Isabel's intended chiding of her having without permission dressed at all. Slipping down to a sitting posture on the floor before Isabel's low chair, Dulce took her hands, and said as simply as she had spoken before:

"I want to ask something of you. Another favour. In your case, always another. It was not quite so in Doña Rina's case—because I did not feel so. It was my fault, you see, and not dear Doña Rina's. But I have learned much since—from you. There is still more to learn from this experience, much more, something larger and deeper. But anyway, I have had to learn already—against a certain kind of pride of mine, perhaps—that there are some things, and some times when, it is right to take and take, whether or not one can repay. Well, in a little room I had once, in another city from here—the little room—I called my mignonettes, that I had on the

window-sill—for I was always naming things, you know—‘flowers of the sun.’ I have happened to be thinking of them lately—and I have named you my ‘Flower of the English sun.’”

“How lovely!” exclaimed Isabel.

“But the favour I wanted you to make me,” Dulce went on, “is for you to let me call you—by your own name.”

“Oh—*do!*” cried the girl, with glad impulse.

“It is the name of a Plaza, big and full of sunlight, here at home in little Cadiz,” said Dulce, “beautiful Cadiz, which you have made ‘home’ to me for the second time. And the Plaza Isabel has only sunlight, no darkness, in my memory—as *you* will always have—Isabel.”

On her reference to “memory,” its apparent thought of their parting, a little cloud, swiftly followed by sunshine again, as might have been characteristically in that Plaza, and here as from a happy, secret thought of her own, came into this Isabel’s blue eyes; but she only said:

“I am glad you wished this—and it is the right thing, quite, after what we have discussed, and followed, about the word ‘amiga’—Dulce.”

In one of their first clear talks, and after Dulce’s voluntary confidences, made in a few sweeping, graphic strokes, with the whole arm, as it were; and upon their first embarrassed direct reference to the trials—of and from—the classical aunt, made necessary at last by a more than routine uproar, howsoever followed by the routine departure which always gave their communion just a fragrant touch of the delightful flavour of forbidden fruit, Dulce, in the refreshing after-silence, had said:

“Aside from these present troubles, I would like to ask you something. It—it is indeed something quite important to me. Has—has your Aunt Gibraltar something especially to do with the word ‘Society’? Something, so to speak, *intimate* to do with it—intimate in a nice sense, of course? If you do not see what I mean, take that word, ‘Society’; and if you drew a picture of

it, as an American Indian would, instead of writing it down, would—would she be that word, with, let us say, a great exclamation mark?"

"I—I think perhaps she would!" Isabel had ventured. And Dulce had sighed:

"I begin to see my difficulties, then!"

And Isabel's gently urging questions had brought from her a short but vivid description of one of the elements of her big manifold purpose in life, full of wonderfully exposing lights and of thrill for the listener, till Dulce, with a little fluttering tone of sad finality, had concluded:

"You and your aunt, you see, are Society. Yes, you too. *You* are easily satisfied, you dear, dear woman, but that is just your individual character, which even so is just as much the opposite of mine as hers is, and which even so, and granting even better birth than such as I have, would make you befriend me, but forbid you to be my friend."

Isabel had been silent, but it was because tears were gathering in her eyes, whose light gleamed through them, and when she spoke the words were swift and short.

"It will not and it shall not!"

The speech and its manner were her one adoption, indeed, achievement, of vehemence, startling by contrast with its source—the vehemence of a calm nun, which made it like lightning in a cloister.

In that moment her aunt's cause, if it had ever been potential, even in possibilities for the future, had been forever lost.

And also from that moment, to the sick and struggling Dulce, now ill, but forever struggling, Dulce the creature of blood and of imagination, who sought by instinct, and inexhaustibly, for the meanings that usually underlie, and are so often hidden by, the episodes and the relations of life, just as she did regarding its elements, which in truth are always closely concerned with the episodes and the contrasts, to this Dulce this "miracle" of episode so blindly prayed for in the street and so swiftly granted,

became a miracle of relationship, and with its elemental meaning clear to her.

More than in the case of Lola, human, and real, and warm as that had been; more, even, far more, than in the kind, the beautifully gracious instance of Doña Rina, her glowing brain's interpretation of this thing was the idea, definitively idealized, of friendship, whose Idea itself, ideally represented by the beautiful and so beautifully confessed friend before her, took on such new scope, such deeper and such poetical significance for her that Isabel, swiftly if gradually, and permanently, was to be henceforth in Dulce's life not the pretty ballade of Lola; not the story, colourful and generous, which in its highest interpretation in Spain and in Spanish would have been the romance of Doña Rina; but, even if the short huge word did not present itself to her, the Epic of Friendship—an epic that exists only in hearts and souls, and has never been written because it must comprise not the soul-flower of a single nation, but the blossom of an element of the entire world, and universal language is not yet.

From this she had drunk health, faith renewed; from this, hope, strength—strength, she thought, to leave her, when that sad moment of aching severance, sadly and achingly nearing and necessary, she supposed, should come; strength not very bodily as yet, but enough so, she gladly knew, not only to work again, but to *get* work—as she had done, for instance, not so very long ago in the steel-works at Toledo—crossing swords to do it!

And she supposed that sad moment indeed sadly near, this afternoon.

"Isabel," she softly said, prettily, tenderly articulating the name for the second time, "you came to me as an answer to a prayer, in which I had told God that I would cheerfully bear afterward any pain growing out of its answering; and as if He had all your favouritism for me, the road runs backward in this case—I am always giving pain—if only small pains—to you. Here have I asked,

and you given me, a special favour, the moment when I have just driven your nearest relative away from you!"

"She will come back," said Isabel.

"It is quite dangerous, this time," said Dulce. "I think the boat really does sail to-night!"

"She will come back," said Isabel again. "They will not give her supper on the boat. We know that."

"Then, too, if your telegram should come to-day, you might want to catch the boat yourself," continued Dulce, "and you could—for one of the things I am clever about is packing, and that much, at least, I could do for you in repayment, with the idea of it, I mean, before I—I lose you."

Again the light as of a happy secret thought came into Isabel's eyes, but as yet, again, she did not speak it.

"Nothing remains to be paid," she said, gently. "At first, you see," and she pointed towards the bedroom from which Dulce had come, "I studied you as if you were some new-found book of foreign matters——"

Dulce, with no thought of interrupting her, yet interrupted, with a little crying echo of the words:

"As if I were 'some new-found book of foreign matters'!"

"Yes, that I had happened to pick up in that chance little street, and bring home to look for treasures in; and nothing can remain to be paid because by now I have found, not printed treasures, though similar things I did find, but a living treasure—a real, a living friend. That is the way I think and feel about it."

Dulce pressed her hands, with tender, clinging warmth; but though an answer to that treasure-speech was in her heart and mind as in the hands, her first words, and ones that came after a long moment of pensive silence, held to the thought of the phrase that she had echoed.

"'Books of foreign matters,' I have noticed, are usually little *red* books, as stout as they are red, sometimes, but somehow in my mind they have always the word

'little' about them. And your speaking about me that way, a way I truly understand, dear Isabel, has made me think again of one of my special odd thoughts that I have sometimes: that I would like, sometime or other, to make myself into a little book—a little, very fashionable, expensive red-covered book. And just your having said that about me, makes me determined now that sometime I will. I mean, as you right away know, of course, just a little book in which to put down some of my thoughts. And in such a case, it would indeed be a little book of 'foreign matters' in a sense. One of my thoughts, Isabel, dear, such an important thought, is of the great difference God has made—in Society, let us say again—between men and women. To begin with made to be, yes, though about Society, perhaps just allowed to be, not entirely approving it Himself. Only that would be not a foreign matter, would it, but a common matter to the whole world, would it not? So for my book, meaning me, the thought I think I would have to put down for all that would be, Isabel, *that men do not suffer at the closing of doors*. And women do. We women. Yes, I am quite sure, now, that sometime I will do that—if for no more than to make my handwriting somewhat more stylish than it is! An elegant little red book. But by the time I could do all that, no one could *buy* me! As for the closing of doors, dear Isabel, you spoke of finding treasure in me; but ah, what treasures you keep finding *for* me, to gather strength and faith from when—when a door is closed. Already I must be having and be strengthening that thought, for the time when—oh, when you are *gone!*"

Once more the curious happy light shone in Isabel's eyes.

"You are going with us," she said quietly.

"Oh!" cried Dulce.

It was a little cry, a little gasp; her hands in a swift impulse caught Isabel's again. In the brilliant flash of its surprise, she saw not only all its delight for her, but

all the girl's temerity in it: its problem, its difficulties, magnifying the gift. But her rapture was short-lived. She dropped the hands; her eyes turned away.

"I—I would go to the end of the earth with you or for you," she said, "to—to any end—except—England. You see," and there was a little tremulousness in her voice as in the eyes with which she met Isabel's wondering gaze, "you see, it is the—the great angry place that *he* has gone to!"

"Ah," cried Isabel, "my poor dear, I understand! I do! But," and her voice grew light again, "England is so big, and London, why—bigger! You do not realize! And," she continued swiftly, eagerly, "here is the vastly important part of it. When I am married I will be very wealthy. You knew that, did you not?"

"Yes," said Dulce, "and I am happy for you in that thought, because, as I can now know without asking, you marry because, and only because, you love. Without that, and with the money, it would be wrong—as wrong as—as something else, for instance, though 'Society' would not say so—would—would just silently lie about it. I was worried at first. But now I am very, very happy about it." This was little of all she had thought, dreamed, hoped; for the selfishness of love that inclined her to make her own love the whole universe, had given way completely when she dreamed of happiness for Isabel, demanding a million perfections in the man who should have her. She had understood that the expected telegram was to be from him, and that presumably he was to follow it, from some far place, to fetch her—a hint of chivalry that she approved. She had venturingly hoped that this, and her own leaving of Isabel, might overlap just a little, and had even treated herself to a small imagined scene alone with him in which was made clear that henceforth one of her unfailing life-purposes would be to see that dire doom be his unless he proved himself impossibly worthy of her friend. She would not object, for Isabel's own beatific sake, to his being rather old—in fact, quite old,

say twenty-eight or even twenty-nine; but he must have no other flaw.

"And that 'Society,'" said Isabel, "has to do with it too. You see, the fact of that great wealth will greatly increase my duty toward Society, and first, yes, first of all, dear Dulce, there is that great voice—of yours."

Dulce was crying softly, but her bravery grew with her tears.

"No, Isabel," she said. "You will remind me of what I myself have just said—that sometimes it is right to take and take. But not *that*. Not in my case. From you if from anyone, but that, not even from you. I admit that it is different again from Doña Rina, but even so, my feeling that that must be all from my own work is deeply beyond depth a part of my Gran Via."

"I will persuade you," said Isabel with quiet confidence. "And if I cannot, he will. He would wish it, just as he would wish me to have violets here, my favourite flower, while he has to be away, just as if he were here to give them—which is the reason I have them; he would wish it, this other, bigger thing, because he is the *kind* that would—a man such as I know you would wish for me, good, tender, gentle in his thoughts. You will learn this."

The knowledge that she might share even briefly in this part of Isabel's life brought Dulce's hands, wet now with warm tears, again upon Isabel's.

"You have given bountifully, given for both of you, in offering," she said. "And before that, you have given gold and gold like that," and she rose, now, and walked across to the great French windows and drew them wide open, flooding the room with sunlight, "in the fact, my Isabel, of your friendship, that I can have you for my friend without danger to you because I am, oh, *so truly*, no longer what I was. You know, Isabel, women like me—the former me—are supposed to ruin everything they touch. There is a terrible old proverb about it. It says: 'She kills herself. *But first she kills her parents, friend, and lover.*'"

Isabel shuddered—and from memory, for she had heard it, elusively, read out from this her “book of foreign matters,” fragmentarily, in that period of delirium, among several things in very truth new-found to the wide-eyed ministering girl which had made her exclaim to herself, involuntarily, “What terrible words?”

“And,” continued Dulce, “perhaps I did kill my parents! They lived right out there,” and she pointed across the little plaza, “in that little street, the Rosario. I have seen my sister, once, since—since I walked out of it. One night in Sevilla, when I had come from the Caridad where I had seen a wonderful Murillo that reminded me of home here, and of how I had walked out, that very night she saw me dancing in the Seville streets, trying to keep such heavy thoughts out of my feet, and she would not speak to me; and when, in a kind of hot pride, I threw away my dance and persisted, because, after all, the little family money that equally shared would have kept me out of the convent and from the Trudge Market too, had gone to get her married in Sevilla, she turned on me, and said: ‘*They are dead.* You killed them, *you.* They died of *shame!*’ Sisters! Are brothers like that, I wonder? Somehow, I think not—another difference between men and women. Anyway, I did not believe what she said, or pretended to myself I did not, for I had not heard the proverb then. But I tell you I have learned it since by heart, and that was why, when you rescued me that day, of all the streets in Spain I could not bear to be carried through the Rosario, the little street of the Rosary. I am not afraid of ghosts—save such ghosts. There they would have stood, like *Society*—that great demanding Society that has to be *satisfied!*”

Her hands had lifted with the words, and with the last, one of them fell in a vivid gesture against her bosom, and it caught her fingers in the rope of forgotten beads.

“Ah,” she cried, her voice altering to a swift gladness, and her hands lifting the fair things out before her in the

sunlight, "here, Isabel, here is a different kind of rosary, here is the part of me that never *has* been bought or sold! I put them on because they are the colour of your eyes. Think, they are thousands of years old, and never have they changed hands except in loving *gift*! They are Astarte's, from the body of a virgin princess of old Egypt, and were in my family for God knows how many years of those thousands of years!"

With a little outcry of fascination Isabel had come over and was holding them with her, her fingers touching Dulce's.

They shimmered. They were so exquisitely definite and vivid now that it was as if the very shine itself of the sun, not mere light from it, lighted and were moreover an integral part of them. They were robin's egg, cobalt, and turquoise; and where the sheer blue had finally, irresistibly run into an unmistakable green because it encountered the pathetic pottery, the green was that which a young, frail, aristocratic girl bears above her sometimes in unconsciously expressing her nature with the ribbons that she weaves in her hair. Old things are so tired, or so wise, they do not scream; else the cobalt, the turquoise, the robin's-egg must have done other than hang resting in silence there, between the four caring hands, so very vital and so very static were they. All the beads, together, were like rare, especially desired waters brought to meet under one whim of the sun: the profound Mediterranean and the tender Nile, and the ocean of the tropics.

"And in my family, Isabel, perhaps because we were tall-thinking Spaniards, there was a story that if you touched them with money, they would shrink up, and up, if you were not careful to touch them so no more, until they choked you! Ah, I have never put them to that test, it is so beautiful a thought not to have disproved. And I think of them so much as truly so a part of me—the *only* part of that kind!—that I could never even *give* them away, save at my death, unless, as it should perfectly be,

to a great and perfect friend such as you, for some big purpose and reason that could never be even imagined till they suddenly arose; or unless—unless—to—to *him*—which I can—can imagine too easily, and *must* not imagine, because in such a thought as that, in—in—in *that* picture, my Isabel, there—there would be an altar!”

The voice choked, but Isabel would not drop the beads to let her turn away. Chaining the girl to her with them, she looked straight into her eyes.

“And—*why not?*” said Isabel.

Dulce started violently.

“Oh, no, no!” she cried, trembling all over. “The Gran Via is already vast and difficult enough!”

“Dear,” said Isabel, “there is something I have wanted to ask you about. It is some phrases that while you were so ill you repeated over and over. One was, ‘You are romantic, hideously romantic!’ You were talking to a nun. Talking with her pitiably, and in some dim, spectral place, yet that was a real place, I am sure, not an imaginary one. And after a long time, I learned that what she had said to you was, that ‘*he*’ might come back ‘to honourably pay.’ Why ‘hideously’ romantic, Dulce? To me, her thought was *beautifully* so. You were bruised, sore, bleeding then. You are not now. Indeed, *might* he not? All things are possible with God. Great, exquisite is your faith for all other things of the Gran Via. Could you not have *such* a faith, as well?”

In its profound divination, its tenderness of calm thought and deliberate plan, it was Friendship’s supreme offering, transcendent over the proffered money they had discussed, transcendent over the terror in which Dulce was pitiably sobbing, a terror which was turning to that of a great light, feared for its very intensity, that would lead her from her present abject weakness into a great approaching exaltation that was already at work in her—because as she gazed with helplessly immovable eyes at Isabel, held even more strongly while with even more exquisite delicacy now by their mutual look than by the

fragile beads still bridging them together, she was seeing with electrical clarity that every symbol in life is a matter of interpretation, that all evil is capable of good as all good of evil, and that the soul that should have been the nun's under the Christ at Mataró was standing here before her in this girl who was clothed in those flowers from the waxen Christ instead of a habit. And in her mute acceptance of the miracle-gift, the epic of friendship between them slipped from its bounds of mere poetry however great, into the boundlessness of life's highest element, and in that moment became a Sacrament.

In the celestial strength of it Dulce, with a cry, was again the superhuman, *exalté* body and spirit that she had become from the House of the Great Voice, that she had been that last hour of Paris with Doña Rina—and more, for the great causes were superlatively more.

"Oh," was her cry, and the sob in it was ecstatically joyous, "God might allow it, if I can give enough! If I can really achieve the pyramid the gypsy talked of! Oh, I feel it all, and more than ever before! The voice! The pyramid! The crowds! Oh, in that giving to the crowd, it now will be like giving my soul to *him*, because I will be not only paying back, but becoming worthy of him! I will be walking hand in hand with love, though alone, as the gitana said, alone until all is paid, if all ever *is* paid. How strange that one need be ashamed only of *bodily* nakedness—that Society allows one to strip one's soul naked, and give it to the crowd, without shame! Ah, it is all clear, now, without even unhappiness for me any more, real unhappiness, if only I always am enough giving, and find—oh, God grant it!—that I have, and always have, *enough to give!*"

"And you see now," said Isabel, with shining eyes, "why his being in England does not matter, or rather, why it matters beautifully! You will be starting near him!"

"Ah, no, dear, no!" said Dulce, with a smile even in the big sadness of it, "For the Gran Via, you see, is

not like that. It simply is not. I must go as far away from him as possible—until—until——”

“And when I must go, perhaps any day,” said Isabel, “almost as our friendship becomes real to us, you will talk of our parting, of its ending?”

“Ending?” cried Dulce. “Neither one of us could end it! *It has been!* Can you doubt my love for you, and can you think it a matter hurt by time or geography? Remember my little friend that I told you of!”

She turned again to the balcony and pointed outward and upward.

“Lola! Why, even if I never met her again, and I think somehow that I never will, she is still my friend, and I am hers! How could anything as real as that ever cease to be? I met and knew her swiftly, as I did you. And if the matter of it is no longer in this world, then I am sure it must be a little star somewhere, or something like it, that will be giving its light to me along the Gran Via sometimes, even when I do not know it! And with you and me, how much, much more! So it would be too with Doña Rina, who came to me into the Way even more as you did; and as with dear Doña Rina I felt that we would meet again, with you, Isabel, I *know*. Even if we did not, my Isabel, after you have gone, so it will be with us—that matter of starlight!”

A sound startled them from their absorption—a knocking from the corridor.

“Your telegram!” exclaimed Dulce. “I know it is!”

“Perhaps!” said Isabel, and started toward the door, but Dulce caught her back.

“I want to be your maid, as I was Doña Rina’s, for one moment, and especially in this thing! Yes, yes! For the meaning of it!” And she ran before her and brought the envelope back triumphantly. “It is, you see!”

“Why,” exclaimed Isabel, reading it, “I must go to the station at once! This has been downstairs for hours, and it is this train—the one just coming in!”

Even as she spoke, Dulce, gaily swift in her prettily played rôle, was ready with her hat, and a moment later was waving to her in the gallery-corridor over the patio. Then she ran back through the room and out onto the little scrolled balcony. She was sure Isabel would look up, and Isabel did, pausing for a smiling moment, a flower in the sunshine against the bright diminutive flower-garden of the diminutive plaza. Across its toy distance of green and blue and yellow houses she turned once more, for Dulce to wave again. Then she disappeared, into the Rosario.

CHAPTER XXIII

SCORES

THE dancing gold of the sun was that of the descendant hour. It was indeed near the matter of starlight. Rapt in the full vibrant thought of her Gran Via, Dulce stood in this its interstice of peacefulness deeply breathing in its calm and inspiration. And when after a long moment of this debonair drinking she almost unconsciously flung her arms rapturously upward, alone on the dainty balcony and in the whole little plaza, she was less like an old caryatid in the pearly, rosy frock than some lovely modern French statue of tinted marbles. The very silence of sculpture surrounded her—from the deserted room, from the deserted square.

But this was broken—much as a statue might imaginably have been by such dissonances—and she was brought to an awareness of her startling attitude, by a small Babel of voices, and one that specialized one voice, exclaiming above the others:

“Yes, it is she!”

It was the triumvirate of theatre, business, and music; the Jew, the Catalanian, and the Maestro.

“No!” “Yes!” “No!”

“Yes! Yes!” “No! No!” “Yes! Yes!”

“Yes, it is, but in a nice dress!” And the Maestro called up to her: “We want to see you!”

Dulce was the statue no longer. She was trembling with excitement, but happily not shattered to pieces, for she was swift, brilliantly swift, with bravado.

“You were not nice to me the other day!” she called. “I have some employment just now, and I will not let you see me till to-night!”

"I was nice to you the other day!" cried the Maestro. "We must see you! Come here!"

"Come *here!*" replied Dulce, airily. "I am too fashionable to go there!"

And making good her words she turned from the balcony with a defiant toss of her head and ran thrilling into the room. Already it was dusky and she flooded it with electric light and ran on and flung open the door. She could hear their excited voices ascendant on the patio stair, and briefly they were in the room, all talking at once, as suddenly and violently present as they had been that day in the street, and all performing, loud as the end of *Faust*, in an explanatory chorus to Dulce:

"We could not find her, that nice fat woman! Devil! Bruja! She escapes! She repents! Thinking we sail, she goes on board the boat! Thinking she stays, we change our tickets! It sails!"

"Boats are dangerous things that way!" said Dulce. "I was saying so only to-day!"

"And, after a week—Sh-sh-sh-oo-oo-oo-er!—we find *you!*" said the Maestro. His marvellously articulated "sure," the only English word he had ever learned, come to him from some foreign lips and gathered into his sensuous being as a parrot gathers in a curse or a caress, indelibly, appealed to him, with its delicious distortion of the forbidden "u," as an enticing expletive, somehow pure yet somehow fascinating, and he used it as he might have used a heliotrope evening suit—on all, though only, very great occasions. Between his contributions he had been gazing all about, and his long nose was inhaling the violets while even more blissfully the Jew's soul was inhaling the great smiling negress and her cigar.

"*That* is a nice woman!" said the Jew.

"Come both here to business," said the Catalonian.

The Maestro, thin, tall, gaunt, eager, gentle creature, unmistakably Naples peasant but as inevitably sheer lyric, with those soft, fire-flecked brown eyes, the longish, loopy, heavy, dead-black hair and dead-white, large, almost

cadaver-like features, was carrying a great music-score—quite as he might have carried a mattress with him, to sleep on anywhere, as if they had fully expected to find Dulce with a piano attached to her wherever it was they found her; and he did not show the least surprise, now that they did. From all his ways as from all his features, it was absolutely impossible to know whether this was a very old young man or an old man vastly young; and pre-eminent about him was something virginal. Whatever his state, whether monastic or barbarous in its facts, the truth of him was that his real wife was Art—her soul was music, her body, as a rule, was a piano. Her form, to him, was mere matter of indifference: whether she was three-legged or an upright stump, and wherever he ran across her, she was *his*, and he performed upon her. But he would have abandoned her to go live in a cave with a griffin, if it could sing.

"You told us," he said to the outwardly calm but inwardly surging Dulce, "that you have a singing voice. Do you understand the notes, signora?" He named her with this Italian "madame" as though it meant with him some special courtesy.

"No—yes—I am not sure—Why, of course I do!" said Dulce. "Like all poor girls in the Barcelona theatres, I learned by ear from the Maestro and the band. But I am a very strange girl, as I have found out in a number of ways, and I have noticed especially, that once I know a tune, I seem to recognize the notes if I see them afterwards on paper. It was that way, for instance, with the 'Cavalier de la Luna,' which I sing exactly as well as Raquel Meller can. Let me tell you, that if I look at this——" Even as he had opened his lips to bid her, she had stepped to the piano, on which he had stood open the big score. He swung about on the stool, and struck a key for her, watching her with some amusement, more anxiety.

Dulce began to hum, but she stopped short after a few notes.

"No, no. I lack confidence, because these two other men have been so disagreeable the other day!"

"You must not lack confidence," he said. "I see something in you. You have a beautiful face. You look like me. Your nose goes the same way."

"Does it?" cried Dulce, nervously startled.

"Yes, several ways." And he reached up and put a long finger on her nose. "No? Yes? No? So and so, and so? But all to the same end. The same end as mine. Music. I like you!"

"Oh, thank you!" gasped Dulce. "And if you will but play a little, I can sing it afterwards, from memory. Then, I will always remember the way the notes look, I am sure. It is a queer thing with me, that I cannot explain."

"Perhaps you are a genius, like me!" he said. "I never had to learn the notes at *all*! Never!"

He played a few bars from an aria, Dulce listening intently. But instead of singing it, she turned to him with raised eye-brows.

"Why, that is quite pretty, is it not?" she exclaimed. Then she hummed the air softly, correct in every note, her eyes travelling the page as she did so.

"You have surely studied music, yes, signora?"

"When I was very young, two or three lessons. I was four years old perhaps. And it was here in Cadiz—I am truthful, you see. We had a little money at that time."

"Then you are a wonderful mimic, a wonderful ear!"

"Very wonderful indeed," said Dulce. "You have yet to know."

He took his hands from the keys and folded them resolutely.

"You can hum all that again—without the piano?"

"Of course!" said Dulce.

"Do so, then!" and she did so.

"And this?" He played further, double as much. She

hummed it all promptly, swaying a little with the melody as it grew.

"That is pretty! Who wrote it?" And she looked at the top of the page. "Why, Valverde! Joachin Valverde—our own marvellous Quinito! No *wonder* it is pretty!"

"But we have yet to hear the voice, signorina. The first bars, now—you remember them? Sing them then. And I mean *sing*. The full voice."

"You mean loud—as loud as I can?"

"Yes, as loud as you can."

Dulce stared at him.

"But name of God! Indoors, that would be very vulgar, would it not?"

He laughed gurglingly.

"We have yet to know, signora!"

"But if I put my head back——!" protested Dulce. "Why, you have never heard such a racket!"

"Perhaps not. Let me hear one now."

Dulce threw up her chin, her throat open, and sang the melody—slipping, intoxicated with her power, from tone to tone on to the end. Perhaps she had never truly heard her own voice before. The sound, full, limpid, pure, poured out with the natural abandon of a bird's, joyous as a child's, but big, filling the room, lilting, natural, glad yet poignant with pathos. When she stopped, the sound died away into a stillness as absolute as that which suffuses a great audience about to burst into wild noise. She was frightened at the noise she had just made herself, and at their silence.

"What did I tell you?" she demanded.

Her question snapped the spell in which the musician sat, and jumping to his feet he turned excitedly to his companions.

"Dio, Dio, but it is the *bel canto*, the *bel canto*!"

The Jew shot him a look of caution, the Catalanian spoke to him rapidly.

"You think you could teach her?"

"Teach her? I have nothing to teach! I have but to play the notes!"

"If we give you this fine part, señora——" The business-man addressed her, but the Jew interrupted him.

"A grave risk, you understand!"

"——can you agree," continued the Catalanian, "to be ready in three days? We can offer you your expenses and a hundred pesetas weekly."

Dulce was quivering, and at mention of the sum was speechless; but in her very confusion a quick thought came to her rescue, and she turned her gasp of joy to one of seeming horror.

"For such a lovely voice? Remember, I have lived in Paris, and a hundred francs is ridiculous. Two hundred, I think, no?"

"Well, well, with your expenses—a hundred and fifty?"

"Well, for the present, yes," said Dulce, "for I recognize the sort I am dealing with. You may have heard the saying: that there are no Jews in Barcelona because the Catalanians are still stingier. But to start with, we will call a hundred and fifty fair enough."

"Bruja!" snapped the Jew. "It is far more than fair! The play is but an hour-piece, and you need but two costumes!"

"But I shall dress very fashionably," said Dulce.

"Let us hope so," said the Catalanian. "We lose money as it is, for thanks to that other devil we cannot now get a theatre here. Beginning next week, we are engaged for the Tivoli in Barcelona."

"Barcelona. . . . The Tivoli!" gasped Dulce. "There is fate in this!"

"A drowning, perhaps," grinned the Jew, "for we are going by ship direct,—not rail—and you said yourself boats are dangerous! And this one might be for your bargain, for are you going to be sea-sick, or do you know how to learn music on a boat?"

"Of course I can learn music on a boat! Why not?" said Dulce.

"Very well," said the business-man with finality, "we take the *Trasatlantica*, sailing at light to-morrow morning, getting in Monday. Time for one rehearsal with scenery. Open at night. We will now sign a contract, girl."

"No," said Dulce promptly, "for I might wish to sing in the Grand Opera at any moment. I am very honest and would give you fair warning ahead, just as I would expect you to do me. So a contract is not necessary."

The two men stared at each other.

"All right," said the Jew. "That works both ways! We are going to the boat now. Come. Are you ready?"

"Not—not quite!" gasped Dulce. "I will meet you!"

"No! No!" they both cried, frightened.

"Go get her ticket," said the Neapolitan, blandly. "I will bring her. Go on!" And the two, shrugging their four shoulders, went forth, leaving her alone with her Maestro.

"Oh, you are so good!" she cried. "But even *you* must leave me! I will meet you outside, in the Plaza. You will understand! I *must* be alone, before I start on—this—for at least one, one moment!"

He looked into her eyes, gravely, then with a slow, divine smile.

"*I can trust you!*" he said, the words slow as the smile, his head nodding with satisfaction. "Shoo-er! But can you trust yourself? You are too excited!"

"We—we can both trust me not to be a *thief*," she said, "so leave that," and she pointed to the score, "and I will have to bring it to you!"

Again he smiled like a seraph, again his words were slowly spoken.

"Yes, yes, you have the temperament! I will wait out there!"

"I will be there!" she cried. "Indeed, for you I am running away from someone else. Mind you appreciate it!—for, oh, it is someone who must not see me, that she

may be a *little* the less hurt! So if you see an elegant lady and gentleman coming, whistle—do not fail! You cannot mistake, for she is so beautiful she will look like sunshine, even in the starlight! Whistle—*that!*”

And she pointed again to the score.

“I will whistle it,” he said. “Part of what you sang—the cigarette song.”

In the doorway he turned and looked at her, and once more smiled—that slow smile.

“*I can trust you!*” he said.

Alone, once more, with a long, long breath, her hands clasped before her, she gazed toward the balcony, and then, the hands still so held, she walked across and stepped through the tall windows for one, one more long, ecstatic moment upon it, now in the quiet fullness of night and starshine, and stood gazing down at the silent tiny square, its blackened toy garden, the lantern, now agleam with yellow, hanging from the yellow church almost within reach of her hand and shedding its radiance over the clean cobblestones across to the two absurdly narrow streets leading in.

“Oh! So the Gran Via can be by water too! Strange—I had never thought of that! Oh, what a clean, clean way to start again!”

She dared no further moment.

She came swiftly in, across to Isabel’s writing-desk, and took up a pen, the words “Darling Isabel” clear in her mind; but suddenly and equally clear there leapt back to her her words to Doña Rina: “I—I spell like the devil,” and she dropped the pen.

For a long instant she stood with her back to the desk, her hands clasped against her bosom, which was rising and falling with the surge of a new thought that had come to her. Then the hands fastened decisively tight on the Astarte beads, lifted them swiftly from around her neck. She ran over to the piano, hung them, with their now electric-lighted and rich, shining, indeed, glazed blues and greens, in the purple violets; swiftly bent and touched

both them and the petals with her lips; and sped into the bedroom.

When after wonderfully few moments she returned for the score, she was in her dark, worn skirt and waist. And when she closed and lifted the heavy score, heavy moreover, it almost seemed to her excited prescience, with destiny, its big-lettered name on the cover flashed before her, and she nearly dropped it.

LA GRAN VIA it read.

"Holy God!" she gasped. "And I have ever doubted *anything!*"

As she stood gazing at it in trembling wonder, the big book held before her on both arms, a whistle, the whistled lilting notes of the cigarette song, came distinctly out of the starlight of the plaza.

With a violent start she clasped the score with one arm against her breast, ran to the further bedroom, and noiselessly out of it into a side corridor of the patio gallery. A few seconds later she was with the waiting Maestro at the corner of the church; he took the score, took her arm; still a few seconds later, he had led her, unprotesting though her heart beat wildly, into the dark Rosario, where she had learned to walk . . . out of which she had walked, before, into her Gran Via. . . . After them through the silver night of the ocean city came only the calling whistle of its patrolling guards, signalling in the quiet starlight.

CHAPTER XXIV

GRAN ÉXITO

AS the big ship drew out of the Báhia, Dulce stood at the rail in the radiant early morning, watching the slow retreat of white Cadiz against the blue sky. She had never gone to sea before, and a thrill of excitement was in her.

But her mind, despite the little ocean of music surging from boundary to boundary of it—for she had studied with the Maestro all night—and almost overflowing from her fatal success and with thoughts of the torrents of work that must suffuse the slender handful of days and nights, was yet calm: curiously, quite deliberately calm, at its own imperious dictation.

She had told herself, that rapturous last long moment in the little balcony, as she gazed into the starlit plaza, that thus her mind must be; that until her rôle was mastered, the notes sure and unforgettable on her tongue, and the words pinned securely in her memory, and the steps—easiest of all for her—as ready in her toes as the most hereditary of Peninsular dances, she must not think beyond the circle of these things, must not look either backward at the old Gran Via or forward along the new one; that at utmost best the time for the bulk of all this arduous task would be the two days on the ship; and even in decocting and determining all this, reflecting, too, that as to what had happened and what was about to happen with so much suddenness to her, later on she could—and certainly would!—consider it all; and even that, then, do quietly, slowly, surely.

And with that instinctive grasp and use of imaginative things that so often helped her in her paucity of learning,

she had decided then and there on the little balcony that the silence and the starlight paralleled the calm that she would need; and she had striven vividly to picture them, and to lay away the thought of them, to her purpose.

She remembered them now, as she stood with her hand on the deck-rail in the soft light of a day rare in her native section of the world—rare because for all of Cadiz's glitter as it sank away, there was a haze in the air that subtly held a quality of mist . . . the sun would disappear, to-day, before his time.

"This is indeed an 'éxito'—one that must become a *Gran Éxito*! How different from the other start! I suppose no two beginnings are ever quite alike. . . ."

Cadiz was gone . . . somewhere down into the salt water like lost Atlantis. Dulce was alone, Cadiz behind her for the second time—forever, if she so chose now!—and the true *Gran Via* was begun. She would be utterly alone, with God and salt water, to-night. The ugly words of the Jew came back to her, but they brought to her only a little wistfully happy smile: "No, I was never born to drown, except in the meaning of tears, perhaps!"

She began to think slowly, carefully, weighingly. Fate was with her, so much she believed unquestioningly. Her big conviction, the revelation of art that had torn the wall of ignorance from before her yearning, untutored mind just as that other miracle, an understanding of human love, had wiped the soot from it, was as real and sparkingly clear to her to-day on the face of the waters as it had been that mad hysterical evening with Doña Rina in Paris, as it had been that life-clarifying epoch of an instant with exquisite Isabel yesterday; and was dwelling with her serenely as a pure religion.

For to her big desirous spirit, lacerated in the cruel kindergarten of the Trudge Market and burnt clean by its muddy fire, her conviction was a religion essentially, and, in its beautiful sense of a "bringing back," a religion literally . . . and her faith in it was as great, and in its

basic acceptance by her as simple, as the inherited faith of any primitive daughter of her old, sweet, simple race.

She thought she saw, too, her Gran Via clear to the fulfilment of this religion, insofar as that might, indeed must, be allowed thought now. The beginning was already made, and with a God-given endowment, for with all the purposeful reserve of the two managers she had comprehended their satisfied, almost fearful discovery of a phenomenal voice. And the next step, the only one necessary to consider with care until it had been taken, was not only prepared, but to her characteristically confident mind supremely easy, for it was merely so to succeed on Monday night that the verdict "*gran éxito*" should be loudly plastered on every fence in Spain.

Later, there must be, she knew, long months, perhaps long years, of drastic study, monumental. But that was a distance off, because first she must have the money to pay for it. And as for the terrible pesetas that she had sworn to pay back into the market, that thought of all thoughts here concerned was *not* a calm one, and she knew she must forswear harbouring it, save sunk to the very deepest of soul-waters, just now.

Her eyes, grown misty as the sky had grown, were fascinated to weariness by the swift passing of the blue-green water, and she dropped back into a deck-chair, lowering her lids a little to keep the strolling, chattering passengers from intruding Spanish-wise into her quietness; and hour by hour the day slipped toward noon and afternoon slipped toward sundown. A thick, soft line grew distantly out of the sea, and with a little quiver of delight she thought: "That must be Africa! I am already seeing *continents* in my Gran Via!" And she wondered whether the far blue haze above the line could be the fabulous Mountains of the Moon. Afterward her dreams must have melted from waking into sleep, for she started dazedly when the Maestro touched her arm.

"Do you not wish to see, signorina?"

Her deck was quite deserted, and in vague curiosity

she followed him to the other side of the ship, where passengers were lined all along the rail.

The sun was covered somewhere behind her in the west, and before her, far across the waters, grey against the dull pearl of the sky, a delicate miracle rose in two huge mist-like crests, two giant, solid shadows toned with tender hints of lavender, mysterious and unreal, melting slowly into one Titan ghost of stone.

Dulce caught her breath at the filmy vision, dragon of a continent, symbol of a nation . . . the symbol of it, for that nation, broken; the love of it, and the rock of it, unbreakable. . . . Much, often, as her thoughts, her talk, had been of it, she had never seen it before. . . . Then Gibraltar, like Cadiz, was gone; her ship was gliding into to-night's dark grey waters of the Mediterranean. . . .

A night, a day, another new sun, a glittering heavenly sea, bluer than paint, and Little Gibraltar, guarding Little Paris, was standing before her; the red earth and red rock of fortress-crowned Mont Juich, descending to the waters' edge at Barcelona's entry.

Overswept by memories, but gloriously free of her terrible walking, she drove up the Ramblas, past the Continental—"Everything shall be new!"—across the Plaza Cataluña to the Hotel Inglaterra—"Inglaterra, Isabel's land!"—She had no desire for food, but some instinct told her that she must not dine like a Spaniard just before the performance, so she forced herself to a noon breakfast, and then walked the brief square to the Tivoli, into its drinking-garden, and thence through the big low auditorium to the stage. At last her rehearsal was over, and that of the "*Espectáculo*," which was to precede the little opera, began. In the wings, the Maestro was praising her with warm, gentle hands and lighted eyes. Even the Jew had lost his frightened look; in his eyes and those of the Catalan the gradual expression of respect was growing.

"You will be here at eight-thirty? Or assuredly by a quarter to nine, señorita?"

"Is that necessary, señor? We do not begin, you say, till after ten."

"It is better! It is better!" cried the Jew nervously.

"Very well, señor, if it will spare you a frenzy. But give me some more money, s'il vous plaît—quite a lot. I need an expensive *manton*. How much have I had so far—a week's worth?"

"Fully two weeks' worths, señorita!" cried the Catalan. "Can you not——"

"No, señor, I can not! You have said that I must be well dressed, and do you suppose I would consent to anything else in any case? You are going to have a long run on my account, too, remember that!"

"Let us hope so! Let us hope so!" cried the Jew with a sigh, as his fellow-manager handed her money.

"Remember I politely said 's'il vous plaît,' a French word, señores. I cannot blame you for not exactly knowing it, especially as we have nothing just right for it in Spanish. But it means something quite like 'make the favour,' and you might have recognized the *tone* of it! Anyway, I have explained it now, and in addition I now say 'thank you.' Manners are much in this world!" And with mutters of "Devil! Devil!" floating after her, she was gone.

Her part in the slender little comedy of music, a "one hour play" with swiftly shifted scenes and no pauses, was neither long nor, for one of Dulce's lightness of foot and fearless confidence of voice and action, at all arduous; and three times in the remaining hours she rehearsed it inwardly, mentally singing every note, with every word, building new gestures, new movements, new expressions into it. Three times; till at last she was fully satisfied, and her brain a little weary, so that she put it all from her, knowing that the first tones of the orchestra would bring it all back. And to keep busy (and thence pacified) the mechanically moving musical sense, she hummed and re-hummed the *Cavalier de la Luna*, inquisitively studying out its notes and French syllable-phrasing from her Paris

copy . . . thinking of Doña Rina . . . deciding to carry it lovingly with her to the theatre as a mascot. She had no fear of her voice, her dancing, her memory. But her *memories*. . . These, she did fear a little, wondering if she could put them all into the voice . . . if perhaps they would instead swarm up and overwhelm the voice, and her . . . José Luis . . . that terrible immaculate night . . . Melba . . . the Louvre. . . .

She had promised quarter to nine; but "It will be just as sensible to scare them a little," she decided, and accordingly, though she summoned a carriage at half-past eight, she gave directions far more reaching than the distance of the palm-lined little stretch to the Tivoli.

"The Calle de las Cortes, friend, out to the bull-ring, and around all of it, and out into the Gran Via, and down to the Gracia, and then to the Tivoli."

It was a *pasear* of memories . . . with underneath them, the hum of her rôle once more. She had finished the last subconscious note of it and swung again into the Apache waltz as the carriage swung into its few short blocks of the Gracia, when, suddenly, she stopped humming.

It was a thick, soft night. The two side-street corners with the fashionable "Novedades" and the casual "Tivoli" cheek by jowl were within sight; and stretching out from her own theatre through the rich darkness burned the opera's title in great shining magenta-pink electric lights: "LA GRAN VIA."

To see it thus, written in the air, and concerning *her*, in such roseate letters against the warm smudge of this city's languorous night, had brought tears, a swift helpless rush of them, to her cheeks. When she had been driven under it to the stage door, she hastily paid her driver a double fare, and marched into the dark corridor to the stage.

"Well, well, that is all right, señores!" she answered calmly to the wild relieved swearings of the managers, and went with no further ado to her dressing-room.

Distinguished from all her companions, she did not have to share it, and so was happily alone, for as yet she could afford no maid, and persuaded herself that she did not want one, buoyantly visionary as were her thoughts of Doña Rina, and especially that very early comment of that dear woman's over in the bull-ring. . . .

Above the confusion outside her door came to her the brass clang of the *Espectáculo*, "The Magnificent Peccadillos of Don Juan," which were loudly blaring to an end, even in Spanish imagination, for at least one night. Dulce's body was trembling all over, but her mind was not. Her voice and feet would steady at the music. She knew that. . . . Don Juan crashed with his large loves into silence. . . .

The Maestro came to her with a kind word. "Thank you, Maestro," she said through the door. "I am not afraid." A few moments later she heard the first tones of the overture.

When the call-boy came to her room he did not find her. She was already in the wings, waiting. The whole score was familiar to her now, and she stood humming and slightly swaying to the rhythms. Her heart was tumultuous. . . . *Gracias a Dios*, no one spoke to her. . . .

She had left her face very pale, with lips brilliantly carmined, after the new French fashion she had seen. Her very simple gown was of white, a deep rose at its waist—none in her soft dark hair, which was parted and drawn into a low knot at the back of her beautifully modelled head, which thus was almost black against the marble white of her neck. The white gown was cut very low—just a little lower than anything she had ever seen in Spain. Held behind her, and drooping from the hips and over her lovely naked arms, was the *manton* that also she had ferreted out to-day—from the junk market, this, for which she had determinedly bargained indeed, but with no such noise as she had described to Doña Rina, for her lilting musical inward rehearsing had been in progress the while. And it was a *manton* sensuous

and rich as music with which she had come forth and with which she was standing here now—old, far, far older than she, a heavy Oriental fabric from the far, far Philippines, black and gold, with stabs of red and yellow and old blues, darkly beautiful as that of the French Bréval's "Carmen"; while in Dulce's eager waiting eyes was a lustre such as Spain's great Zuloaga had seen when he painted the Frenchwoman in it—a lustre as if a rosy light of life itself were burning before her and burnishing her features in deliberate place of the tavern-fire of Spain's super pigment-master's masterly Romance. And too, she was quite like the great thing in more than her rich manner of countenance and her Chinoesque *manton*, for the light, in verity, was from within, an expression that, externally mingling with, and painting her in, the gas-flare of the wings, exposed her soul, and in this moment that taut soul was an apotheosis of the two opposed forces of her nature and her life—it was both virtuosic and mature.

Lost as she was in the music that with each phrase fetched her nearer to her great instant, yet the great memories were flashing in a radiating stream before her. She remembered, afterward, having wondered, swiftly, intensely, if the riot-coloured vision of the Louvre could show in her eyes and sound in her voice, as she had told Doña Rina it would. . . . Then a few words of spoken dialogue smote in her ears, followed swiftly by a fatal phrase of the orchestra, and Dulce, calmly beautiful as a swaying exotic flower, was no longer in the wings, but walking at last into her natural home. . . .

Her final consciousness of herself and of the past was a vague, instinctive insistence of her mind upon the structure, plain to her lately developed sense as an architectural design, that she had conceived of her rôle. After that, she was in the living present, moving, singing.

She scarcely heard her voice until, as it grew seemingly of its own will bigger and bigger in the unfamiliar freedom of the great auditorium, she became aware of the

stillness of the hundreds—the complete stillness of willing silence, rare indeed for the thoroughly Spanish Tivoli, which for a voice was to a nicety crowded. She felt the dropping of cigarettes and the lifting drift of their blue smoke, the stealthy, quiet bending forward of heads; but most of all, last as first, the utter and unnatural silence of her country-people. In it, clear and lilting and full, liberated and limpid, seeming to float, and poise, and float on again, Dulce's voice was singing its way that was to lead, in very truth, through long, long distances.

Her own voice was singing; her own people were listening.

Her own, and her own; and she herself was listening now, too, even as she poured and poured it out, to the voice that was to sound around the world.

Quivering as she leaned against a canvas set, she heard from the wings the stamping, the shouts, the mad clapping. And through it all, she heard the hoarse excitement of the two managers, crying snatches of sentences beside her. . . . "Gran éxito! Success! . . . Gran éxito, señorita!"

And it was. . . . A great End, that was a great Beginning. . . .

"Of course," shouted Dulce. "I told you all along it would be!"

Suddenly remembering, she rushed to her dressing-room for her swift costume change; made it; rushed back.

"You are in time, señorita, you are in time!"

She was dressed in scarlet now. She went on swinging with the orchestra-lilt. Despite the costume the house recognized her, and the band paused at the momentary noise. She blew a kiss to the mass of yelling faces, and the great silence came again instantly as she opened her lips. . . .

Again the storm broke, and madder than before. "A chorus," she thought, both thankful and regretful, "and it is over!" But the play was halted. "Again?" they

were roaring, above the stamp of sticks and feet. "Again! Again!" And flushing with delight at an assenting nod from the Maestro, she sang . . . and again . . . and again. A trinket from a woman fell at her feet, and Dulce, taking her white flowers from her scarlet dress, kissed them and threw them, and ran into the wings, and there, exhausted from excitement, stopped short. But the stamping and shouting did not. The chorus stood awkwardly about on the stage, waiting, with witless-looking wit. It did not occur to her to go on and bow. The Jew and the Catalan both rushed up to her.

"Can you interpolate?"

"They demand more, señorita!"

"Do you know something, anything, that you could sing without orchestra?"

"The 'Valse Brune'?" said Dulce. "Any orchestra would know that."

"The 'Valse Brune'? What is it?"

"The Apache waltz—the 'Cavalier de la Luna'—you must know 'La Apache'!"

"Yes! Yes! Sing it! Be quick!"

"I will for more money—that is only fair. Shall I have it?"

"Bruja!" cried the Jew wickedly. "Are you the devil's own? Do you hold us up when——?"

"You say *they* demand more—so do I, then!" said Dulce flatly. "I am no robber! *I have a good purpose in it, do you hear?* Shall I have it?"

"Yes!" screamed the terrified Catalan. "Yes! Yes! *Go on!*"

Dulce stepped to the stage and in the redoubled din whispered down to the Maestro: "La Apache."

He smiled; and as a rustle of expectant curiosity went through the house she stepped hastily again into the wings. She tore off her dark-striped gypsy sash and knotted it swiftly about her head. Then, her shoulders stooped a little, her gait slouching, her face transformed to all the sombre tone and meaning that her old terrible

life had been, to the preluding notes of the song she walked out—slow, brooding, sinister.

At the first strains of the familiar melody the silence had been broken by a rustle of applause that died with a snap as she appeared. With her love of effect and her keen sense for the unexpected, she turned her memory to the Paris version of the song, and the voice for which they were waiting rose through the hushed theatre in the sensuous words of the French.

*"Ils ne sont pas des gens à valse lente
Les bons rôdeurs qui glissant dans la nuit.
Ils lui préfèrent la valse entraînant
Souple, rapide, où l'on tourne sans bruit."*

On and on the lovely voice insinuated through the rhythmic lines, rising and falling, on and on to the wordless phrase of the orchestra which swings, as her ominous tense body prepared to swing, into the lilting brilliance of the passionate refrain; and then she changed to the soft liquid beauty of her own tongue and—Theirs.

Into the great voice there crept a great cry; and there was a great cry in the heart, as in the words:

*"Oh, this is the tune, friends!
We're Cavaliers of the Moon, friends!
Each boy swoops down like a loon, friends. . . ."*

CHAPTER XXV

MONEY

THAT thick soft night, in a street of the Gran Via Diagonal, whose name in its simplicity marked up a great symbol on the house-corners, a queer thing happened.

Spain—as the city—was at rest: no missile had lately hurtled at the King, no conspirator met bullet or *garróte*; and even this her greatest and most turbulent cosmopolis was humdrumming and had been long without excitement, and it must be to-morrow before she would wake, in her gossip-arteries, to the available if questionably large news of the advent of a singer, said to have been of her people, who had just now torn open a handful of Spanish hearts and senses in “La Gran Via.” Anarchy’s claws were drawn in, if in no more than a muscular process of digesting something, and Society slumbered; it was an everyday night.

It was late. Theatres—even the dawdling Tivoli—were done. The gay city was gone or going home or unhome, to sleep, or to other matters. In the tall shadow of a quiet house a man and a woman were speaking; she, cheaply garbed in fetching black; he, more expensively dressed, and with fetching voice jocose and suited to their parley.

To an observer, had there been such, it would have proven an every-night thing, as common as vulgarity and as necessary as poverty.

Yet to such an observer on this thick soft night, a sight very strange would have arisen suddenly, like a gust in a desert, or a lightning-flicker in weird clouds at sea.

While between this man and this girl passed banter

and protest, by them passed a woman—afoot, and unaccompanied, and indeed, plainly garbed, yet with a large and so handsome *manton* so shieldingly wrapped about her as to mark with a legitimate reason her being here, now, and alone, and thus constituting this, too, in itself, some every-night thing, comfortable, pretty, and as common as industry or money.

But, on the yonder corner, she stopped short, turned, and swept swiftly back along the shadowing house-fronts of the Gran Via, the heavy lustrous *manton* now swaying to the rapidity of her stride.

The two figures which she now seemed purposefully to approach had first stared, then shrunk further into the shadow; but her determination revealed itself, and she walked directly and unhesitatingly up to them, her bright eyes showing their steady gaze to the man.

"You seek," she said, "to buy this woman. Perhaps she asked you to. It is of no difference either way—you are not going to do it. You need not gape at me. If it were not for men like you, women would not have to take such money as yours. *Go!*"

He still stared at her, flushing with shame and anger. And she still kept her eyes steadily on his face. Her arm rose in an imperious, pointing gesture.

"Get out!"

It was the hard, inflexible word of the nun under the red wax blood of Christ at Mataró—vulgar, but so intentionally, deliberately so in its manner, its tone, in all but the voice itself, that it was lifted above the nature of vulgarity. Masculinely scared in the searing flare of her, the man left.

The astonished girl in the shadow found her voice at that.

"How do you dare,"—it was the angry answer to the nun—"how do you dare to come into my affairs?"

The startling woman's words were ready and swift.

"Because I have been in exactly such affairs myself. Because no matter what you have been, and why, this

thing is wicked, horrible, pitiful! I do not know your life except the part of it shown to me as I passed you. But that much, let me tell you, I *do* know! I now have money, *honest* money, but for a while I was as bad as any girl of my age well could be, and now that I am able to pay back, I am trying to—every centimo that I ever took that way, do you hear? Every centimo! *May the Virgin blast the fact that I kept no count*, for it forbids my counting now, and in my strange unhappy mind I may perhaps never know that all has been repaid! See, I am going to give you money, girl!”

She was with trembling fingers unfastening a heavy purse that had been clutched under her mantle.

“I will not take it!” cried the trembling girl, shrinking back under the mad heat of the woman’s words. “I am afraid of you! I will not take it!”

“You *will* take it!” cried the woman fiercely. “You *shall* take it!”

And with one hand seizing out a fistful of uncounted silver and copper, and holding the terrified girl tightly with the other, she thrust the weighty coins into her dress—her collar, her bodice, anywhere.

“It is better money than *he* would give you! And *more*! Now I have done my part, and may God grant that you do yours! I have given you much, much! How much I do not know, for there were two others to-night—but it is nearly all I had with me, leaving enough for one more, perhaps! You can afford, now, to be good for a time at least, and while it does last, oh, think, *think*! You might get other work and start again! Think what you traffic in, girl! Whether you had excuse or not, I do not blame you—who am I that I should? Yet it is traffic in God! Traffic in God!”

And suddenly sweeping away, she took up her own traffic, disappearing like a spectre into the limbo of the thick soft night.

Nor was this strange incident held solitary by the confines of Barcelona, gay, indolent Little Paris. With

stranger and still more strange architectural canvases backgrounding its hot spiritual action upon hard glittering matter and with its vehement figure diversely costumed, sometimes obscurely cloaked and again recklessly splendid, the hectic hands graphically jewelled, the sudden presence stepping from a swift, smoothly running, abruptly halted car, a modern goddess out of the machine, picturesquely terrible; in Great Paris, where in its obscurer cruel streets the woman's tears in her vehicle too often followed bad laughter that she had heard or felt upon her words and act; in Berlin, in Rome—and too, beyond salt waters wider than the Mediterranean's; even in cold, jingling-belled Saint Petersburg . . . indeed, in many great cities of the great way of the great world, it was to repeat and repeat and re-repeat itself. .

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BOOK III
THE PAINTED DESERT
CHAPTER XXVI

THE ATTRACTION OF OPPOSITES

“WHAT are you writing, Wanda?”

The woman who spoke was a little princess. First of all, she was a little American; the “princess” was to boot. And, as she was in the terse habit of putting it, the prince had evidently thought so—until she had succeeded in converting the verb into a noun on the other foot. Just now she did not know where he was, and did not care beyond an over-acute inquisitiveness, a characteristic that she had but now displayed in her question to her friend.

The pen scratched on and there was no reply. “Wanda” was a name suited, as such matters go, to this other woman, who sat at a luxuriously appointed Sheraton desk, writing in a limp-red-leather-covered little book. Daisy—such had been the small American’s name before she was Madame la Princess Marguerite—said frequently enough that “Wanda” sounded always reminiscent of a sinuous, tigrish Polish or Austrian spy of dubious affections, yet that it did express, as prettily as a name could, her special friend, about whom there was nothing dubious or Austrian or Polish or tigrish. A certain worldly magic of action she did have, an elusiveness of movement, a touch herein of Cosmopolis rather than of mere Europe, that disclosed itself even now in her calm posture at the desk—the unconsciously artful

capacity for suggesting, with a line of garment here, a droop of shoulder there, a casual gesture of arm, that she was tall, or not, or statuesque, or *précieuse*.

"Wanda, what *are* you writing?"

The little princess had risen; and from a delicate picture of indeterminate lines scrawled hazily along a couch and drooping in a trail of soft tints to the floor, had crystallized to a defined little body like a small pink flower tipped with God's sunshine, but clouded by a gauze bow for an indoor party. She stood wavering by the desk like a diminutive, breeze-stirred, insistent growth, and in the continued unresponsiveness of her busy, silent comrade, took up from it one of its rare statuettes of Tuscan terra-cotta, gazed long at it as if it reflected her own minute and lovely person—which it fairly did—and sighed in all her classic tragedy of being not noticed.

"Wanda?"

Wanda de l'Etoile laid down her pen reluctantly and directed her beautiful eyes with disapproval at the little princess.

"Daisy, if you must pull out petals—'He loves, he loves not'—do destroy yourself that way, not me!"

"A-ha! So it *is* a love letter then—or a love diary, what?"

"Not as you could possibly understand the word 'love,' Daisy."

"Wanda, you're a pest! And please don't call me 'Daisy.' I detest it!"

"You detested 'Marguerite' a short while ago. It reminded you of 'infamous, nasty scenes' with your husband. Poor, poor man! Why did you change your name for him—the first, I mean? The last, you had to, by law. But the first? It might quite well have stopped with 'Daisy,' or 'Forget-not-me.'"

She took up her pen with determination, and the little princess, after an attempt to glare like a lion and managing only to stare like a pansy, sighed again; employed one of her tiny hands in an equally futile endeavour

to stand the statuette on its head; and with a third sigh meandered home to the couch.

The only similarity in these oddly assorted friends lay in the mutual fact that they were gentlewomen; and they were this with a difference: one was so by sheer instinct, the other by birth—perhaps more, it would often seem, perhaps mere, it would seem sometimes.

The latter, little Marguerite, was utter Anglo-American—inclined to the Anglo in point of speech, while in appearance (blonde, bisque, dainty and as modern as the book she was not reading) she was the distinctive thing that means not only just one country but just one city—New York. Wanda, obviously though so elusively, was as foreign as her name; a woman beautiful, dark but not black, with lustrous, shadow-lashed eyes, and lines of mouth particularly exquisite when she laughed or spoke.

The rare adjective “sumptuous” had not come amiss for this face; and her serious beauty of personality and person, of grave spirituality shrined in calm grace of body, doubtless had for the trixie little princess that curious but by no means uncommon phenomenon the “attraction of the opposite,” which the miniature “royalty” domesticated with her as doubtless had for Wanda.

“Sumptuous” was a word also for the foreign woman’s accoutrements, which subtly subdued the trite luxury of this New York hotel apartment. The minute appointments of the delicate desk to the Etruscan glimmer of the terra-cotta of its ornament added the soft shine of dull gold in its equipage. Here and yonder, pictures spoke of tastes both selective and deeply personal. Even the disturbing little princess was like some *objet-d’art*, a whimsical, trifling possession, a dainty Dresden china figurine moving about in a toy scene of toy society. And her own lovely figure, withal its ease of costume betokening this afternoon a stay-at-home plan, betrayed reckless expenditure in the rich simplicity of her house-gown, the fingers of a richly skilled maid in her arrangement of hair.

"Wanda!"

"Yes, Daisy," said Wanda, calmly and without looking up, "yes. It is a love letter—a love diary—and at this moment I am spending my valuable afternoon telling my cavalier all details about you."

"Now," said the princess, profoundly, after an instant's pause, "if that were the truth, Wanda, you wouldn't have told it!"

And as if deserving complete relaxation after the weighty intellectual process of this rejoinder, she lapsed into considerable silence.

And presently, Wanda laid down her pen, with a little sigh of her own in its passing, and locked away the book, humming. The princess pretended indifference and turned a leaf of the printed one she held. Wanda's hum strayed into softly phrased lines.

*"Silencieux, ils enlacent leurs belles,
Melant la cotte avec le cotillon
Légers, légers ils partent avec elles
Dans un gai tourbillon."*

The rough-edged, yellow-covered volume, "Les Pommes de Jacquot-Jacquette," half flew, half fell from the impatient hand of the little princess, and its noisy flutter and thump put a stop to the unfinished song.

"I didn't mean to interrupt, Wanda. I wanted to listen. What is that tune?"

"Have you never heard it?"

"I've heard you hum it a lot, that's all."

"A little Georges Krier song. It was popular in Paris a few years ago. I do not know if it ever came here."

"It's pretty."

"Very."

"We're both dull to-day, Wanda. Are you staying in to-night?"

"Yes."

"Would you—if I asked you—dine with Dmitri and me?"

"You will have more enjoyment without me, my dear. Therefore, no."

"But *ought* I to go without you? I'm not a bit sure——"

Wanda laughed.

"Daisy, you think me cross, to-day. I am not. But—but you are so foolish. Why should you not dine with Dmitri alone?"

"Do you call it foolish, Wanda, to watch the proprieties? Not that there's anything wrong, or even improper, in my dining with Dmitri. But being separated from Sergius and everything—the look of the thing——"

"Daisy," said Wanda slowly, "from the various millions of people in New York, perhaps a few hundreds—let us say two or three thousands to be very safe—know you exist. And perhaps those are worrying about your conduct. And perhaps they are not."

"Wanda, you're deliberately cruel to-day!"

"I am deliberately sensible, and—fond of you."

There was something even slower than her speech—a something pensive, almost brooding—in the movement with which the quiet woman, this curiously sweet Wanda de l'Etoile, rose and walked across to a window, where she stood between its sun-gilded curtains gazing out with her back to the reproved little princess. When she turned, slowly again, there was a further something in her posture and her look which brought the other woman impulsively toward her.

"Wanda, I'm so fond of you that sometimes I positively hate you! I know I'm only the size of a straw, to begin with, and then you have ways, perfectly silent ways, of making me feel as if a hurricane had blown, or as if a horse had eaten me!"

"I do not think I am like a horse or a hurricane, Daisy." Wanda drew her down upon the window-seat, circling her tenderly with her arm. "Let me tell you what it is I do think. My dear, I think we are a strange couple to be sympathetic friends. Because we seem to be

not sympathetic at all. Yet we are intimate, the word you Americans use so much, like the French. I want to tell you something. You will misunderstand it, I fear very much, instantly and perfectly, and the end of it will be, very likely, you will fly into a rage and go out with Dmitri and on my account disenjoy your dinner, and come in late and weep and kiss me and say you love me, and if I am sleepy, you will call me a horse or something. Yet, my dear, I keep on hoping you will sometime understand, so I am going to say it. It is this: you have in English a saying, 'A drop in the bucket.' Dear, you are a drop in the bucket of my life. Dear, can you understand so much, before I go on?"

"Yes, Wanda, yes," said the little princess, stammering in a struggle of anger and fright and affection. "I understand I'm only a little casual thing to you, of no importance! I understand that that is what you mean—don't you?"

"To begin, yes—for I have to talk to you like a simple book of language. Now, if that is so, why do we live together, why do we take the trouble to have disputes, why do I have an interest in your unfortunate marriage and your 'love affairs,' and why you an interest in me, whom you know nothing, really, about? Simply and only because we love each other—is that it?"

"Yes, Wanda, that's it, that's it!" cried the little princess eagerly.

"And yet, Marguerite, there must be a purpose somewhere in such a matter, and as you have no thought-about purpose about anything, then I must be the one with a purpose, is it not so? Shall I tell you what my purpose is with my pretty little pink and white drop in the bucket?"

"Yes, Wanda!" cried the princess, weeping now, and wondering vaguely why she wept.

"It is a small part of a big purpose, Daisy, the purpose to be kind—but that is an unkind word!—to be *of help*, if I can, to every woman I meet. Now, because

you happen to be closer to me, I would rather be of help to you than to anyone else, and unhappily you give me the least of possibilities. When you know your need, ask me to help, dear little Daisy. But you do not know your need."

"I need you, Wanda, because I care more for you than for anything else on earth!"

"No, Daisy." Wanda slowly shook her head. "No, you do not. I would not want you to. I would prefer you loved your husband more than anything else on earth, or if you would not, could not love him, then some man whom you could make happy. As it is, quite likely you do care more for me than for other people, but what you love 'more than anything else on earth' is *yourself*. You will never understand life, and so will never deeply enjoy it, until you love some person, or thing, or art, or just people, more than your life. And for you, it must be a person, I think. Art—you would not even flirt with it; things and people—the briefest of amours. It will be, if you ever learn at all, some Sergius or Dmitri who will amuse you for more than a honeymoon or a dinner—who will amuse you quite out of yourself.

"Meanwhile, here you hover about me in my life, as if nothing had any importance except the little matters of every day, the little emotions and disappointments and jealousies. To be sure, we gain *something* by it. You gain a certain understanding that I give you, a certain companionship for your lonely little unsatisfied soul, and I get—respectability."

"*Respectability*, Wanda?" The princess's eyes widened and stared with incredulity.

"Not the thing itself, exactly—I do not quite need that. But the *feeling* of it. In a way, you are neither fish, flesh, nor fowl, as you call it.—Is that an unpleasant joke? I am not clever enough in English to be certain.—I mean, you are neither married, nor unmarried, nor divorced. But you are an aristocrat—you are very silly, but you are a lady. So when you sought out my society in Paris,

and showed such a fancy for me, and even wanted to be my intimate friend, and even would live with me, I was flattered!"

Again the princess stared, too astonished to be angry at the transient word "silly."

"But so are you a lady, Wanda!"

"You have made me feel that I have achieved that. You made me feel it then, in Paris. But I am timid enough still to wish to keep that feeling about me. That is what I gain. And you must not cry, and say it is only that, and that I do not love you. I do. Not because you serve a purpose, but in spite of it. You see, Dai—Mar——" The voice became almost a rhythm in her hesitant seeking for the just expression of her thought. "I mean, whatever you are, American or Russian or the French in which you call yourself, you are forever *primavera*—always a flower. No matter what you should do,—swear or scream, let us say—it would be a lady screaming and swearing. Such things can be—comprends tu moi? Positively, I can picture that if you should take too much wine, you would be a little tipsy flower."

"Why, Wanda, what a brutal, unjustified thought!" cried the wide-eyed little princess. "I've only been drunk once in my life, and I only did that to make Sergius beat me!"

Wanda sighed.

"You will never understand me, little *primavera*, even while your own words prove me! That was an outrageous trick for you to do, yet I can be sure you took your beating like an aristocrat!"

"But I didn't get it!" cried the princess. "The brute wouldn't hit me! And why should *you*, Wanda? For this is a lecture, because you started by telling me I was only a drop in a pail, or something! It sounded like Sergius—and was probably the truth, as it certainly was with him!"

"My dear, I was serious to-day, as I always am when I write in that secret little red book of mine; and I began

thinking, how you miss life—the way you speak of love, and of ‘being in love.’ If by some chance I should give you that book to read—I have had a thought lately that by a possibility I might—in case I died, perhaps, though I have no intention whatever to die, or something of an equal important instance should ever—Well, if you *should* read it, my dear, you would know better than you do now what love is. You would know that for real persons, for truly living persons, there is no such small thing as ‘falling in love’—that for them, it simply is *love*, without any ‘in’ about it.”

“I—I see a little bit what you mean, Wanda,” said the princess, with again a trace of child-like tears. “I know I’m not worth your friendship! I know I’m silly, with nothing important to my back but my title! And I know I make men dangle, and disgust you! But you are such a friend to me, and you do fail so to appreciate how much I care for you, that I fly into rages—and outrages—from sheer fright that you’ll get tired of me, and leave me—lonelier than I was before! I’m so afraid of that, that I’m jealous even of Arnold!”

“Daisy!” The voice was extreme, reproachful.

“Is Arnold coming here to dine with you to-night, Wanda?”

“Yes—with me if you choose to make it so; with us if you care to stay at home.”

“So that’s why you’re so anxious to make me dine with Dmitri!”

Wanda turned to her with a little sigh. When she spoke her voice was controlled, but its quality was positive.

“Do exactly what you wish. I think that Arnold is fond of you, I know that I am. If you go out, try to do so without hurt feelings; and if you come in early, you will see whether we welcome you gladly or not.”

“Wanda, you’re angry! Forgive me!”

“I am not angry. I will not forgive you because I do not need to forgive you.”

"You are, Wanda! Yes, when people use all 'I ams' and 'will nots' and 'do nots' instead of plain 'I'ms' and 'won'ts' and 'don'ts,' they're in a cold frenzy!"

"Daisy, I was not—wasn't—born to English. I do the best I can do with it. Make me the favour to be satisfied! I am not—I amn't—angry!"

"Oh!" wailed the princess. "Oh! 'Make me the favour'! Now I *know* you're in a passion with me!"

"Daisy," said Wanda, patiently again, "in my own tongue, there is no word for 'please,' so that 'please' was one of my hardest words in English to appreciate—although, strangely, so strangely, I confess it was one of the very first I ever spoke in it—as such things happen, sometimes. In my tongue, there are for it only such expressions as 'make the favour,' or so on."

Yet, despite this educational and quite generous explanation it was quite wretchedly that the little princess trailed off to dress for Dmitri.

Her friend turned again to the window and gazed out at the far, busy avenue.

"People! People! People!" sighed Wanda de l'Etoile.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN THE LITTLE RED BOOK

MY own, my own! After long weeks, again I talk to you. And from where can you say? From America, from the Estados Unidos that you loved, from your beloved Nueva York! Yes, at last I am here, in the land of the conquerors, and I am waiting in a perfect tremble of fright to conquer those conquerors! I have been told harsh tales of the music lovers of New York, tales so harsh as to frighten anyone, the very bravest. But I find them difficult to believe, for here have I been for weeks, having come on purpose long before the season, and nowhere do I find anything but kindnesses! Though I confess to a shudder at the great Opera House. I have been in it, for a glance, and it is cold, cold as a piece of hard, red stone. How I could dread that night!

Well, all of this, my José Luis, concerns you little, you somewhere off beyond unknown distances from me. All that concerns me that could possibly concern also you, is my love for you, the great daring love that has made me write to you this little red book, with my heart full of the tremulous prayer to God that if you could know of that love that has so lived and gone to purification through the fire of living—knowledge!—you might perhaps have the patience—the interest—to read on and through, and that you might perhaps say to yourself at the end: “Is one man in a million loved like this? Might not I, perhaps—? . . .

. . . Dio, Dio, but there, even without daring to finish, I have put down daring words, my own! . . .

I have but now read over many past pages, and what

a tower of Babel is my little red book! Some Spanish, because it is our tongue, native to us, in which our voices have long past spoken to each other, my beloved. And now some English, because that, too, was *your* tongue and is at last, gracias a Dios, more than a little mine. (How, how I have seized at it since I have really come here! I have come to believe it is my daughter tongue!) And then, ever and again some French, because I know you understand it like the others, being so educated as you are, and so clever, and I am so very fond of it, and I have been so much in Paris, where I have begun my little book to you. And also because it can say certain little odd things as cannot other languages. Yet how strange, José Luis, that I should have to say to you three whole languages to tell you only three words—for all that my whole writing can say, all in all, at worst or best, is: I love you. . . .

But in that simple “love you,” how much history I have had to tell! I have lately read through and through to see if I have told all importances, and almost all I have. I have told you of the long road, through the dark of the dawn when you left me, up to the heart of the mountains and the gitana who prophesied my fortune all but the end. (*All but the end*, so that in my ignorance of that end and in my—in—a great nameless hope, I dare even to write to you, as I do and ever and again do, this my little book.) I have told you of Doña Rina, wonderful, sweet, American Doña Rina, whom I have thought God will send one day—ah, let us hope for many days!—again into my Gran Via—because it is a *part* of my way so to think. . . . And of Paris, and of the House of the Great Voice, and of Cadiz, and the miracle of fortune there—the double miracle, *two* miracles of fortune there. I meant, the *voice* fortune. But that would have been anyway, as sun must follow moonlight—*must needs* have been (what dear odd things are there in your great dear large strange English, my José!) . . . and first, that miracle of Cadiz that was not “must needs,”

just pure God's miracle, my Isabel. . . . Isabel who means violets, means them next in my memory to as did your eyes . . . my Isabel who means violets, and England and Friendship, England, that land so harsh in my imagination, that seemed to have highway-manned you from me as it seaway-manned Gibraltar, and that since, in that my very same imagination, for still is England but imagination with me, has seemed the very picture, the very name, Friendship, through my miracle of violets, Isabel. . . . Isabel whom I do not simply *think* God will send, Isabel whom *surely* God will send one day again into my Gran Via, if only long enough for me to take her into my arms and tell her how much I still love her. . . . *Still* love? Forever, through future as back through past, as—yes, in such a respect as *that*—as I love *you*. For in something of eternal verity, in some elusive slant of the eyes, or whimsical tilt of the nose, Love and Friendship are strange unmistakable cousins, dear, are they not? . . . And then—the rest . . . the long struggle . . . the work, work, work, instead of the old walk, walk, walk. And, at last, of the great change, the great, slow change, sudden to know, when all began to be proven, and my faith shown right—when it began to be not just work, work, work, but work and triumph, work and triumph; and then, *nombre de Dios*, entirely triumph, triumph, triumph, with the work holding it by the hand, but so gently as to be only joy! . . .

Will it be so here, here in the cold city of the world's great test? I can say to you yes or no presently, my own. For my little red book knows, like all love, very little of time—a page will mean a day, or a month, or a year. Or perhaps ten, twenty pages will mean only ten, twenty minutes of my love for you. And so has it been in the last few pages that anxious weeks are spent, and to-night, my own, I sing. . . .

Yes, my own, my own, it has been triumph! . . . It is still to-night—or at the worst to-morrow morning—and though at last I am at home, my wraps are still about

my shoulders—or my feet, to where I have allowed them slip irregardless, to say no falsehoods, while I have breathless unlocked my desk to tell you so much: Triumph! My own, my darling, I can hear it yet! I can feel it yet! Oh, what it is to sing for these people and to know that they listen, they listen more, they approve, they—*stamp*—not with shoes and sticks, José Luis, but stamp one great! All the way home in my car I would say to myself, how can I exactly put it to him? And there have I put it just right, proving to you my cleverness with the English tongue—you know I used to say to you I was cleverer than you knew. And they have stamped me great to-night! This has happened to me, to me, here in the Nueva York we are taught at home to fear—and justly fear! Not that I had need to doubt—not that I ever did truly doubt—But to *know*! And to hear it yet in my ears—that noise, its *kind*, the individualness of it! It is an applause the like of no other house, no other nation! Good night, my own! A soft grey light, like a pearl, comes in through the window. I love you.

It has occurred to my mind, my own, that there are some things that I have not told you in this my Little Red Book—when alas, it is now nearly *three* little red books!—yes, two things especially. The first one is—and it is such a bright, gold, cold winter day shining into this Nueva York hotel that I feel cheer enough to touch the terrible subject, even to you—the first one is, that I seem to have gone safely beyond my payment of my money debt to the Trudge Market. I have told you in these my little books how I felt about that debt, and how I was tortured by a morbid fear, a fear that I never would, or could, be satisfied that the whole was paid back, because I had kept no count when I was *taking* money from that hideous market. I have told you a little, indeed, much, *too* much, when I remember how you shivered to the discord of such music from me, and yet too little, because while I was yet so frightened and morose about

it I could not somehow say even in many words what I can say in few words, somehow, now, of how I tried to pay back—the *money* part—riding through the streets until I saw such women as I had been, and then offering them money to desist for at least so long as the money should last. Well, it stands to reason—and I fear I sometimes quite lost mine, in those terrible transactions!—that I soon had thus repaid far more than I had ever taken, for I paid in *handfuls* of money, gold, dear, when my voice had grown to gold, and never counting—and God knows, though I suppose it is a hateful thing to mention, *I* was never paid that way! . . .

Dear, gradually and very, very slowly, peace crept upon me in this matter, and there came a certainty that surely I had paid all, and more. . . . Yet that fear of *the actual figure* walked with me at times like a nightmare or a ghost, a Ghost of Society, so that I, what is called a lady and with no doubt *at all* has the little world of one *about* her, would trudge back and forth in that little world of educated things and people, would trudge and trudge and trudge among her pretty properties, her rare this and her rarer that, and would pray to God, saying: “God, shall I never know, *know* that all is paid?” And at last God answered me very unexpectedly and very sharply.

There had been periods of forgetfulness, of what I would call to myself neglect, when I did not think of it at all, periods in which I am sure I grew and developed better and more normally; and these times would be followed by moods of the old madness, when I would rush into a motor-car and through the streets “just once more.” “just once more,” “just once more,” that I could be *quite certain I was not under the amount*.

My own, I did this unnecessary thing once too many times. God’s answer came. (It does, you know, my own, when a thing is done once too many.) You see, I did it here in His free Estados Unidos, here in your intelligent, sufficient-self Nueva York. I had chosen that

hideous place, Third Avenue—lower Third Avenue. I had heard it called by its pet-name, the Bowery, and having looked this out from some dictionaries until I could add up what I supposed must be the meaning, I thought it must be very lovely, in the style of the Ramblas. This was in my ignorance, of course, not alone of your Estados Unidos, but of Flemish, for you see there is no grand opera, or at least I *hope* there is not, in the Dutch tongue, my own. Well, when I have come to this Avenue in my first inquisitive pasear of Nueva York, and expecting flowers, and intertwisting trees, you can imagine—or rather, I hope very much that you cannot, my dear! And when I saw the pity—ah, the *lack* of pity!—the hatefulness—oh, it was too much, and late at night the mood to do something, to—to *pay*—brought me back there in my car.

And instead of some understanding, some gratitude from the girl, or at least some cowardice from the man, or even the surprise that had many times covered my flight, do you know—how can I tell you?—well, do you know—and can you believe it?—that I am nearly imprisoned, my own? Yes, the lady is proud, and makes a haughty outcry, so that there is instantly a crowd, so instantly that my chauffeur cannot flee us the spot, and so that despite all the money I have with us, and my chauffeur's capability (and what a wondrous race of beings, my own, are the American chauffeur!) I am arrested, and go in a most terrible caravan to the Magistrate. I hope that you have never been pinched, my own, which is the terrible word my chauffeur used, reminding me of the garróte, as we are brought before this dignitary. And there, what with my mortification and my panic, God knows what would have happened to me and my career but for still my chauffeur's gifted nature, who whispers me what to do, and I have to pretend I am insane to try to stop sin! . . . And indeed, there is some truth in that, my own! . . . (While even so it was most fortunate that I am an excellent actress!) . . .

Well, it was God's answer to me. I knew that instantly; and that His command was, that I was never to do it again.

So I am free of that! Free! And freer than ever this instant, at last—having told *you*—if you can understand that, José Luis. . . . Free of the Trudge Market debt, dear! Free! And I thank God—and you, my own! . . .

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Days and days have passed. Though with so few performances, how time rushes by in this marvellous New York season! So, my darling, though no page turned, more than hours indeed tell my little dots, before even yet is told the second of the two most special things in my mind for you, and which demands courage even now to tell, not the variety of courage for that last writing, for as that was dreadful, this is all happily wonderful, yet needing greater bravery still more greatly, and as well a happy mood—therefore I write it down at last, to-night, while I am alone and so very, very, *very* happy. You see, I have just now sung Violeta, and if you knew all that longed to be and did not be in this my little red book, no more would you need me to tell you I am happy, though still would I have to write a *gran galeato* as to all those *verys*. For you see, my “Traviata” was at a *matinée*, a most different, a most disconcerting (I love that last word, José Luis!) yet most *dear* audience. It is very favourite with me, the “Traviata,” so favourite that, as also I am very wonderful in it, I chose it for my *première* in Nueva York, and then for a whimsy changed from that to Juliette, a rôle entirely new for me, partly from thinking it cowardly to do something certain (you will remember I told you I was frightened at thoughts of this town, and I did some self-punishment on the matter) and partly because at every great *début* I have tried something new. Well, I grew almost sorry, for there were delays afterward, one and another accidents, until to-day. And I am happy. For with most singers,

I think, the "Traviata" is a portrait that is painted once and for all, not changing except to grow mellow and more beautiful with time; while to me so dear is it, that always I study to put in something new, and more, and better. And to-day at last I have done a little thing escaping me till now. It is only my entrance. And at last, here have I put what I longed to put somewhere, somehow—I am a *lady* in that moment, and therefore for the whole opera, José Luis. It is something such as—ah, my own!—I did for that moment, for you, that day at the watch-tower on Tibidabo . . . only, applied as should be right with the lady of *the camellias*! Yes, I am happy. And so must it go on with me as to La Traviata, until I know that she is my final expression of her. That will arrive suddenly, some time, from some strange, great mood. Under what strange, great mood of the Great Way will that be? Even to-day meant much of something, *something* to me—just the adventure of singing her to that big, dear, different audience, of feeling that audience feel. Am I too precious about her? I think not. I think it is well to tint and tint the white diamonds of that rôle. "Violeta" itself is a step forward in petal-colour from "Marguerite."

But alas! I have begun one subject to you, my own, and continued another—if I have boasted myself a painter to you, let alone my spelling I will never be a great authoress, my own, of books to the taste of Elise, my maid, and Daisy, a little friend who is dome-sticked—or is it dome-stuck?—with me.

My own, that remaining very special thing in my mind is simply this: in the whole of my now several-and-a-half little red books, I have never told you why it is that I had the thought to write them, why it is that I should think of you as possible, in any way, to my new self, why it is that I have ever even dared to dream. . . .

It is because, first, my own, of that same miracle at Cadiz, my Isabel, of something that came to me *from her*, a thing that I have come since to think of as a sacra-

ment between her and me, so great were the giving and the gift of it. So great that I gave to her afterward, instead, as would have been otherwise my natural act of giving to *you*, the one thing of my property, the one material part of me that—that had never been bought or sold. . . . So can you wonder—you would not if you could know of all this as I could speak it you with my voice—that I have spoken of my love for her in the same breath of ink with my love for *you*? . . . But of these strange sacred spiritual matters that are so difficult for the pen, for *my* poor pen, I will leave most to your thoughts, and to such words of cleverer mood as are here and there in Little Red Book First, and Little Red Book Second, and so on, and come to the truth that I have been cowardly postponing, because it trembles me so. And after all, that miracle, that Sacrament, was but *part*, but the overture, of my great reason. Well . . .

It is because, José Luis, my own, I know that you did not—after all—marry.

God forgive me, that is too large a fact for me to say. I mean only, dear, that I know you did not marry according your intention of that time. All that you told me was “possibly.” I remember the word now as if your adored voice were saying it again to me in that little room of mine in the Carmen. But to me then it meant “Certainly.” I put on it a capital letter, you see, because it is so louder a word than “possibly.” I never doubted that it meant “Certainly.”

Well, I know that you did not marry her.

My own, that very first year, when my voice was *all* to me because it was the *beginning*, the *new* beginning, and had *came* to be all to someone else, to my Maestro, whom I had came to love, and yet love, next with me to my Isabel, as *she* is next with me to *you*, and whom I had really begun to love, I think, when he said our noses, his and mine, went the same way—well, those same noses had within a year taken us and our dear, queer little company as far as Venice. And we were canalling our

poor great way to our poor little theatre; when, as if sent out of God's own harbour for my sake (so *personally* kind is God sometimes) an English party in a gondola passed us. And as they did, with me so near that I could have touched them, one of them was saying, "After all, that erratic José Luis's marriage *was* put off! One might have known it!" Ah, my own, my own, my hand shakes now to think of it! Is it not miraculous I was not fallen into the canal and drowned? I was, with tears, a prophecy I had sadly made for myself once, as we chased them, for *how* we chased them, and how my wonderful Maestro helped the gondolier to speed us after—for he, my lover as one's loving family might, if one had a such, be one's lover, understood somewhat—indeed, much, because much understanding *me*. Had it been a baton that he seized from the gondolier, no more love and genius could he have shown, and we *did* come up. And *then* they were saying, "*How beautiful Venice is!*" Think of it! Yet, even so, Venice *was* beautiful to me that day, for I knew that it was, as it is, after that manner that the Great Way must always be, and I was content with what I had learned. I would have been, to God Himself, an *ingrate* otherwise! For it said to me there on that flashing sunlit canal, that that broken engagement was not *just a fact*, but that it had been, in some way, a matter of some great truth, something that my shaken mind must not be too daring in its thoughts of. Yes, such a conviction reached me like a message, a call to me, straight through space and across the waters, clear as if the Great Voice itself had again spoken to me! And there then happened to me, my own, still one more miracle. Yes, my own, from that moment, *that great sobbing in here*, though you cannot see my hand lift to show you as I write it, that great sobbing that had been with me without end, without a moment's pause, ceased in me. Like Floria in "La Tosca," I had already *lived* for Art and Love, but I had not *breathed*! And from that moment I began to breathe—indeed, I mean

that it was a *physical* thing. From that day, that Venice night as I sang, my breathing was different, musically better, and my Maestro was so happy! Oh, the sunlight of Venetian waters! Ever since, sunlight, too, has been something different.

So you did not marry her, José Luis. For if I know you, or life, or music, or anything in the world, I know this, that you did not tell *her* of *me*. That much sacredness, my own, I know you gave to the little cheap room in the Calle Carmen. Therefore I know that she did not give you up (what woman would, could, anyway?) but that you gave up her.

For what reason, my own? Oh—and it is the thought that I did not dare to indulge that Venice day!—*for what reason?* Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps because of something kin to something that *I* began to feel for Society just then? *Perhaps* because of some new feeling on your part, not quite new in your *thoughts*, for something of it was there and you spoke it from them to me, some new, and growing feeling, growing from your thoughts into your actions—not for *me*, dear, but for what the terribleness of our—our relationship meant in the scheme of the world?

Or *perhaps*—greater miracle!—because of something you felt for me indeed? But Dio, Dio, how did I dare to write down that?

Oh, my own, my own, I should pray to God that it was the former.

Yet my faulty heart, having conquered the battle of the flesh for itself, yearns that it may rather have been that latter, and lifts itself up to God quite unashamed in the huge selfishness of that desire. . . .

And yet, my darling, despite all this that I have just explained you, despite my sacramental communion with Isabel, which in a great imaginative way was like her bringing of you back to me in possibility, and despite that news of God to me on the wonderful Venice Canal, so slow to the *habit* of Faith is timid human nature, when

first I actually began the Little Red Book, it was just to talk to you. Just to tease and torment myself with the imagination of it—the imagination of your nearness. Then, as the unexpected relief and comfort of writing it grew more and more close about my heart, there stole in, subtly, subtly before I could be aware, the desire, then the intention—almost—that it should be actually in truth for you to read, God granting the possibility. I have of late—forgive me if the speech is plain or the vanity great, my beloved—believed myself to be worthy of your love—not only that, but of the best love that you have in yourself to give to any woman. Let God judge me for having dared to say that, José Luis! And I have felt that if anything in the world could make you believe that, ever, it would be this same little red book, in which I have written my soul out to you—my new soul. . . . Under what circumstances it could possibly come into your hands; under what strange condition of impulse or of meeting, if we ever again should meet, I would have courage to send it or to put it into your hands, my mind cannot imagine. Yet to the mind whose every little nerve is desire, unimaginable circumstances seem possible, even imaginable. . . .

Sometimes, dear, I have the thought: “If ever he should come again into my Gran Via, would he even recognize me?” (To-day, did you see I have gone forward writing as if were no interval? When indeed I have gone forward toward the grave, my own, what with that little friend in my apartments, and having to sing other grand operas too! But then after all, in my love for you there *is* no interval, believe that, my own!) “Would he even recognize me?” And despite all the strange changes in me, that have left little of the young girl of the Ramblas, I know that instantly you would. It could not be otherwise. For cruel as fate may be, shudder as I may to think of some of its cruelties that I have seen, I have a great beautiful conviction that my life, therefore my love

—for with me, dear, they are the same—cannot end having been completely empty. And that would mean, in turn, that there *were some* moments in that little room in the little Street of Carmen when, whether you knew it yourself or not, *you loved me*. Yes, loved me. I breathe it. Can one breathe with pen and ink instead of a throat and air? Then I have just breathed it, so delicately that a blotting-paper could take it out.

I breathe it again, more faintly still—so great is my belief, yet so terrible my doubt; I believe, that in little unknowing moments you loved me. . . . It is my creed. . . .

Granting *that* so, it would be impossible you should not know me instantly. . . . I spend hours and hours of my life wondering where you are . . . how you are. . . . Yes, even *who* you are, for your last name, my own, I never knew. . . . Are you an idle man still, or have you taken up your dear gone padre's great businesses in Mexico—how I hate that ugly “x,” about which I quarrelled with Lola the day I spoke to you, but which I now know in my education is correct, indeed necessary, to write, while it stops also correct to speak it aitch. “*Aitch*”! Now am I educated?—or by some chance have you become perhaps an artist of some kind, or some other kind of famous person? I think not any of these unless the first, the great rich businesses, for though I have just now said I do not know your name, my eye would have caught instantly the “José Luis” out of a whole large newspaper page of smallest newspaper print. . . . As it sprang at me like a star, no, like a sun itself, out of the sunlight of that oh how sunlit canal that Venice day! . . .

If the miracle I dream of should happen and we should meet, how changed you *would* find me! I am right, indeed I think I am, when I say that of that girl of the Ramblas but little is left staying. Sometimes I feel that I am not myself, even *a* self, at all, for I feel that I am almost totally but little bits, little thises and thats, of

other people. Because I have built myself so much out of others, out of what I have seen and heard. Since I have came here I am told that I am a little like Nordica. How that delights me! I know that in *one* respect I am. I had seen her often, and had thought her an *heroic*. And do you know that upon meeting her, which I had the joy to do one time, I found that she—she, Nordica!—was less tall than myself? And it put a wonderful thing into my mind: I knew then that forevermore afterward, I could look any size I might choose to on the stage. And the singing angel—she showed me how to do it. In one minute she showed me! . . .

But oh, my dear, my dear, what I began to say to-day, here in the middle of my latest little red book, was not that my personality and—and looks, if I may say—are changed and—and—better! (Yes!)

I was going to write—with self-flattery if it must seem so—that my *soul* is changed! Do you think I love you as I used to? Never! Never! . . . Yes, the nature of that old love is there. (And if it is *God's* truth, then it is a truth that may be written, that I think, I *believe*, that He gives me the right of the nature of that love—with you.) Yet it is a different love, José Luis! Oh, what a different, different love! . . . It is a love, dear, through which I could happily die having once just laid the palm of my hand upon your forehead, if you would lay your hand upon that hand. . . . I believe, sometimes I am certain that I *know*, that I have now a *good soul*! Oh, with a new soul, is not the past dead, José Luis? With a totally new soul, is not the past wiped out? Yet I have times of fear—fear that all this change is only like a cosmetic, a coat of paint—an *americana*, to make a tragical cleverness of words (as I remember I did one time, without one single tact, to dear Doña Rina!) yes, like a costume—perhaps the skin of a snake—like a something that covers me only as this beautiful bit of Etruscan terra-cotta covers in my ink . . . that ink with which I try to express my soul. . . . Is it perhaps that my soul

is *rightly* so expressed—by ink? . . . Ah, surely not! For Dio, sometimes I think I have been boiled in nitric acid enough to make more than only the outer shell Etruscan! . . .

My own, I have never told you of my funny little friend Marguerite—Daisy is more right, for she is American. I have spoken of her, yes—possibly more than once. Instance, I did even to-day. So doubtless you know what is the case (how I persist to speak as if you were indeed to read what I write, even just as it is a quite opposite possibility that I am arriving to tell of now!) that she is my close friend, alive with me in my apartments. So it is, anyway; but it happens now, through some thoughts of mine lately, that I must make her plain to you. But I must take care my writings in English, my dear, for I think I have there said something against Daisy's looks, which are beautiful. Anyway, then, she is an American, young, rich, indulged—likewise self-indulged—and pretty, who marries a Russian title, truly believing herself, I truly believe, "in love." I also truly believe that she truly believes herself a good Catholic. Therefore she leaves her mistake, that is, her husband, in a fearful rage, yet does not divorce it; and remains quite miserable ever since—to advantage, for she is hereby the higher prize to dangles-on, and moreover the prettier for what she considers grief. And to greater advantage than even she herself, with all her valuation of that title, knows, too, for such very difficulties may divert some second calamity of too much haste. Now, my own, smile if you will at *me* saying so, but *I* do not think her a good Catholic—let me say it that in that matter she is not at all what I think *other* people ought to be! Of course in the end she will not *stay* undivorced, for she will ultimately be what *herself inside* is, and Catholic or not, that whole Daisy is Church of English, incarnate and in miniature. Anyway, and which I am much interested to find suddenly out, having already said that much to myself from my observations of people, she is but a Catholic adopt.

And for what a reason can you imagine, my own? Because it is *smart* to be a Catholic here in this country, where nobody else is, and shows her to be travelled! My *own*! Now, *smart*, my own, is one of the American slangs I do not quite understand, though by diligence I will yet, for the book says to sting and burn, or to be clever. But it also means something that Daisy is and wants to be more so, so—she is a Catholic! Yet my dear, so far as her marriage is concerned, what she *really* is is a Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Greco-Russian, for by that Church was she performed in marriage or she could not have got her title! In my liking for words I learned the name, but could not in Russian because Daisy knows no Russian except some *pet*-names. And *that* Catholic Church, my dear, *allows* divorce! So where is one? And where is *Daisy*?

Again anyway, she was in Paris last season, and seeks me out there simply out of a fancy to know me, and having heard me in Petersburg the winter I was quite a Russian furore. Then afterward she becomes sincerely fond of me. Well, because of this and a hundred more pretty, unreasonable reasons about her, I have a great tenderness for her. I wish, oh how I wish, that I could make her happy! I cannot yet, cannot even tend toward it within a friend's boundary, I mean, for I can think of no instrument to my hand, no knife, no *chisel*, that would open her mind. It *will* open—like a blossom under a shower. Some pretty day—a day in May it would be, I think—all those splendid Churches in her brain will totter and dissolve and be no more, and the faith that just so happens to be *my* chosen one, the simple knowing and feeling of love, will take her. And all those great Cathedrals will survive her, and not one stone the looser for what *I* would think her meantime falsehoods and blandishments upon them!

And why have I this trifling bouquet importantly to my heart? My own, life is full of love, but so many ships and trains of it go by us! Nor do we ever give without

receipt—that is, if one has an eye to see, a heart to feel—an instance, though to say how and why would need for itself a whole little red book, because of this little Marguerite at home, my own Marguerite is better at the Opera. Yes, believe it—since I have known her, something more of daintiness, something more of pathos. . . . And still, why all this to you? I have arrived to it.

You know I love to help women. Doña Rina and others—exquisite Simpatica, for an example—educated me to that love, though I like and pride myself to think I had at least some of it by nature; and my Isabel, I think, completed that education—“turned me forth,” I think the English says, as from a whole school of life in it. And I have been so discouraged of ever helping Daisy, that it has seemed to me that only the hearing or the seeing, the *understanding* of some such love as mine for you, could help her at all to see life with larger, gentler, less selfish, self-hurtful eyes.

And so I have decided this: that if I ever should find that its first purpose is hopeless, or I ever should for some great reason turn from that purpose, having found that God did not intend my little book for your eyes—those violet eyes, my own, my José Luis!—then, I should give it to Daisy. A foolish, possibly, a possibly useless, a perhaps overintimate thing to do . . . yet the love that tries to show itself here from time to time, from page to page even, so far as the *trying* is concerned, words, only words as it can succeed to comprise within here its little red covers, might better be expended in that way, than wasted—wasted. . . . And *might* thus be—indeed, my dear, it *might*!—that silver shower that would open the springtime blossom of her pretty rosebud mind. . . . She knows nothing of my old life; not unnaturally, *nothing*; and all that would be a great shock to her—a mortification, possibly, though I may wrong life itself, not to say sweet little Daisy with her eyes almost as loyal a flower-blue as my Isabel’s, to speak so bitterly as that. But any *shock* from it could do her no harm, for it would

but help her to see—would all that shock part—what love and faith can be (yes, and can *do*, if again it is self-flattery allows me say it) despite the sordid and terrible in life. Nor could her knowing it hurt *me*—not even in some material, unimportant way; for she is fidelity itself to me I know—indeed I have just named to you the colour of her eyes!—and a confidence to her would be sacred.

Well, well, if this is by fate for your violet eyes, my own, then I have been but speaking once more to you my inmost thoughts, my daily life; if for Daisy's so lighter blue ones, then they will perhaps open, and certainly understand, by this late page, why my little red book has been meant, after all, for her—for her, little Daisy who thinks me so severe upon her, for her, little Marguerite, out of all the people—all the flowers—in the world! But I will not think that just now! . . . My heart would grow very weighty if I did, very, very weighty, my José. . . . This afternoon, Daisy has been about near me as I wrote, pesting me—whom she has but now called a pest—plaguing me with questions. How little she dreams what I have been writing, despite her demand and demands that I should tell her! . . .

And through her chatter, my darling (I like that word "chatter," and I like "darling") have I succeeded to put down according my intentions all of the neglected or forgotten things (or feared things!) that had gone not formerly into my little red book? No, no, there is one more, that I must hasten while I think of it—In one way more of which I have not yet told you, I have greatly changed: I do not say Great White Mother of God any more.

It is not fashionable here, or any other such astonishment-expressions.

But I will say it again presently on account of Daisy's Greco, or Roman, or Episcopalian—no, *catholic* interruptions, if I do not finish! She has been silent for two minutes, which is ominous—it means, she will momentar-

ily throw her book about! For to-day, good-bye, good-bye, my José Luis, my violet-eyed, my own! . . .

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CHAPTER XXVIII

PEOPLE

MADAME DE L'ETOILE and Daisy must both have lost count of the deceptive winter afternoon's time, Wanda with her absorbed writing of her book, the little princess with her basket-ball game with "The Apples of Jacquot-Jacquette," for as Wanda turned away from the now twilit curtains, possibly stirred by the diluted sound of a telephone ring, her maid came in with an announcement that betrayed an hour lost somewhere.

"Mr. Arnold Rutgers, Madame."

"He may come up, Elise."

"I told him so, Madame."

Madame's eye-brows and shoulders moved a little, but her voice sounded no impatience.

"Then I will see him before I dress. It is later than I thought."

"Yes, Madame."

It was evident that Elise knew the time; and quite without her announcement of the imminent Mr. Rutgers it would have been plain from Elise's appearance that an hour at the very least had escaped the prima donna.

Elise was a pretty woman—very pretty; and in this interregnum, a professional moment in an unprofessional costume, she was *chic* to smartness—in a tailor-made coat and skirt, a beautifully slapped hat, and carrying Jacquot-Jacquette. This was not Daisy's book. The name of that was "*Les Pommes de Jacquot-Jacquette.*" Nor was Elise carrying that dainty creature, its heroine, either, but another creature, named in her honour—a small, silky, quivering, pitiably high-bred, pricelessly

hideous Belgian dragon. Elise was looked at when she took the air—if Jacquot took it with her.

"Mr. Rutgers, Madame."

Wanda greeted him with a touch of the hand, a touch of words. The distinguished young man answered in kind. His only very distinct salutation was to Elise.

Elise curtsied, dragon and all. But though her posture and atmosphere spoke a certain aristocratic bored patience, she did not go. She had not been dismissed. And it happened at that moment that she was desired, for Daisy's voice waved suddenly in from her room.

"Elise, have you any idea where Jacquot-Jacquette is?"

"In my arms, Madame la Princesse!" replied Elise.

"Oh, bête! Non, non! Mon roman! Mon roman! Mon roman!" called the princess's voice impatiently, and she burst in upon them. "Elise, you spiteful great big fool, you *knew* I meant my book!—Oh, Arnold!"

Obviously too, and very, the little princess had lost track of the clock, as she had not supposed Mr. Rutgers here as yet. But she was not displeased to have disclosed herself to him in this wise, for she was beautifully done for dinner, while as yet without her wraps—specifically, she was in a very low-necked gown, as low as it possibly could be, and made still a yard lower by a yard of chiffon tied into a bow around her small lovely throat.

"Well, I'm glad you're here, Arnold, for if Elise *will* slam out on the exact minute, at least there's someone here to help on my cloak!"

"You're not dining with us, Daisy?" he smiled.

"No. Wanda didn't want me."

Wanda entered no protest, but she had a cavalier.

"She did, Daisy. And I didn't."

Arnold Rutgers was a rather exquisitely courteous man. It was by dint of this fact that he could successfully say precisely that to the little princess. And in just such moments Daisy was just such—a Little Princess. Though she might not have measured up to him in a

pugilists' ring, she was quite as tall as any drawing-room.

She looked at him with a slow smile—such a smile as might appear on the face of a beautiful kitten if it could stand on its hind legs, as Daisy could, and articulate a few frail wisps of intellect, such as Daisy had.

"Arnold," she said, with that smile, and her little paws clasped exquisitely under her chiffon whiskers, "Arnold, you are delicious!"

She was thus delicious herself because Mr. Rutgers was a man, and a very good-looking man. If a woman had said it to her, or anything like it, she would have done one of two other things: if an ugly woman, she would merely have smiled that same smile and silently eaten that woman's canary behind her back; if a beautiful woman, she would have paused for one instant, and then, swollen to three times her natural size, flown at her with a yowl never heard in this world except from its one actual representation of hell on earth, a back fence.

"Never mind about the book, Elise, because I'm dining out anyhow. But how the old scratch it could vanish between the last time I happened to drop it and the next time I needed it, dazes me. So do be civil for once in your life, Elise, and if you *do* see it, *PICK IT UP!*"

"Yes, Madame la Princesse!"

And Daisy floated back to her room.

"Elise," said Wanda, "I will dress myself to-night."

"Yes, Madame," said Elise. "I knew otherwise you would have reminded me an hour ago."

Again a little something happened to Wanda's eyebrows and shoulders, but again the voice was fully patient.

"So you may go, Elise. But about Daisy's book, do find it to-night, for you will be back before she likely will, when she might want it and I might be asleep. It disappeared for hours last night and made a wretched evening. So I am anxious for her to finish it. And the sooner she does, Elise, the sooner *you* may have it to finish."

"Thank you, Madame. I finished it last night," said Elise.

Floatingly as the princess, she left them, and Wanda's guest turned to her with a smile.

"I see men's problems are small ones. But then, their luxuries are fewer, too. I suppose one can't be valeted, and have one's favourite dog exercised, at one and the same moment."

Madame de l'Etoile gazed at him incredulously—for a long moment silently, then with a gasping question.

"Can you tell me, Arno, you thought that dog was *mine*?"

In his own turn for startlement he found no reply, nor was there time for one, for a sudden little heat of words came from her—from Madame de l'Etoile, whose subtle calm was one of her loveliest beauties.

"All this time you have been believing that? That is an *outrage*! Have you *looked* at it? There is nothing like that in my character! It has been always my belief that people who do not love their servants do not deserve to have any, but let me confess to you, Arno, Elise is a catastroaf! Elise is why we have to live in this strange thing called Apartement-Hotel, instead of a privater and more particular place congenial to me! Elise is why that dragon Belgique lives *with* us! That pitiful faceless thing is *Elise's* chimera, not mine! Nor could I do anything but admire them when they would not allow us into the Ritz! Nor is that *all* of Elise, either! Elise's whole parts of speech are oui, oui, oui; madame, madame, madame; and when I make a very clever joke and say 'My dear, my *only* Elise, will you not just once say "us, Madame"?' she says again 'Oui, madame!' and is silent, and nothing happens! Or else, there happen just such confusing sentences as just now about Daisy's book—which make me suspicious that her *soul* is not monosyllabic, in the least! I would disband her, but that I have ruined her with patience for anyone else, who would in consequence brutalize her, and but that I am determined I shall love her

yet if I can by means of trying long enough! Ah, well, well . . . glory be to God anyway! There was a time I had no maid at all!"

The completed come-and-go of her little outburst found his eyes ashine, for travelled as this man was in human souls as in earthen cities, this woman had for him always the fascination as of a tinted Latin town for the American temperament. And his chance to-day into a small domestic vortex of her left him glad, glad not only in general, but of a detail. For with all his meticulous love of her varied rich and dainty appurtenances—even, for her sake, a love of Daisy, who seemed a rightly whimsical part and parcel of her entourage—always he had found himself unable to love the shivering Belgian dragon as a spangle of her glittering *pasear*. Surely, he had been dull; he should have known there was nothing like that in her character. And now in the great light of her petty news, even the pitiable shiver of the poor doomed little degenerate beast became a justified part of her equipment. This queer woman, like the star that was her name, lighted up anything, even Elise, even Elise's dragon. He had not answered, for she understood his silences, and such perfect spontaneity as hers might not understand his poignant enjoyment of it; and their mutual quietness was broken by the inrush of Daisy to depart for her dinner—first, to be groomed into her cloak by this present cavalier—and her arms overflowing with luggage: the cloak, and a fan—enormous, far more enormous than she, and with which she purposed to herald the re-entrance of fans into fashion.

"Thanks, Arnold. *Yah lub-lu tea-byea-yah!* Or do I mean the other of the two things I know in Russian? My God, Wanda, there's Jacquot right under your desk! And you always swear you never touch it!"

"You threw it at me," said Wanda.

"Why, Wanda, what a ghastly lie! Well, *lub-lu* for short. Mouthy thing means 'I love you,' and I learned it to please my husband. The one I was starting for when

I saw 'Jacquot' means 'Good-bye'—and I learned *that* on his account, too! Wish I'd studied more of the beastly stuff. I need it for Dmitri. Well, I'll use one of them on him to-night. Perhaps I'll use both!"

And with a final pin-wheel whirl she rattled out to her saucer of milk with Dmitri, beautifully unconscious that with Arnold Rutgers present she had been an entrancing, an entirely different kitten from the one that with equal sincerity she was alone with Wanda in the long hours of the day and sometimes the longer ones of the night; and leaving many things beside impressions behind her: On Wanda's lips, a kiss; in the air, a drift of one from her finger-tips to Arnold and a faint essence of heliotrope. With them both, a promise to enjoy herself and to return early: "Never fret! I've *got* to be back before Elise, because this is her hat. The nasty beast wouldn't sell it to me!" On the window-seat, the fan—fortunately, in a way, for it was safer forgotten here than forgotten in public. And alone in the deepening twilight together, these two.

"That is a perilous thing she has done about the hat," said Wanda. "And I am rather sorry about the fan, too, although it is valuable. For she has taken the book with her by mistake instead, and the fan would only be stolen, whereas Jacquot-Jacquette will be recovered, and be brought here by a liveried servant of Dmitri's to-morrow morning about six o'clock, to be put only into my hands, in person; and not by mistake either on the servant's part, but because Daisy is known to be careless with it."

"Why six o'clock?" he demanded.

"Because Daisy might want it at six o'clock," she answered.

"Burn it!" he suggested.

"I would not dare—no more than I would dare to burn Elise's! I am in despair, really, now that we know Elise has finished it. For if Elise lets fall that to Daisy as she did to us, Daisy will have a good excuse not to hasten with it. Daisy is honourable, you see, and she promised Elise to hurry if Elise would hurry with a letter to Dmitri one

day. Yes, I am despondent, for I glanced into it lately. There are fifty chapters, and from the mused pages, Daisy has read five."

"I'll take her to my studio, and finish it aloud to her."

"She would be found asleep in your studio. It would not do."

Remembering that to-night, as in the long ago, she was without a maid, she had risen to disappear against dinner—accurately, supper, for she was to create the meal with her own hands; and with, it always seemed to him, a delicate something of the pure art with which she created a character.

"Why do you trouble to dress, Wanda? What need?" he queried.

Her reply was with a slow, arbitrary little smile.

"You would deprive an opera-singer of her vanity?"

Again the curious shine came into his eyes. One more facet!

And now, with only the glint of it and the inner glow of his devotional attitude, he was quite alone, among her rich-coloured, sombrely twilighted properties.

Familiarly, yet a little awe-struck even now, he moved about the room, in its growing darkness so softly pendent between its walls streaked with the last flickers of rosy western light—his tread as soft, his fingers as softly touching, with hesitant reverence, this and that and the other that were personal to her, peculiar to her. He paused with almost a quiver by the Sheraton desk, knowing that he could not touch, even most of all reverently, what he had seen her most reverently touch, and that he knew to be locked away within it. For the big artist, like the small princess, knew of the little red book, though his wonder, unlike Daisy's, had been silent. Again unlike Daisy, and with the broad charity of men, even the most passionate, he did not return the little princess's jealousy. He was almost, though perhaps with a smile, reverent of her, too, as of one more possession of Wanda's—an accoutrement characteristic, personal, as high-bred as the *dragon Bel-*

gigue and a trifling, dainty dream instead of a nightmare, and with some equally loving reason, he had no doubt, to account for it. . . . Yes, one more facet.

For in his meticulous brain-concept of her, this woman in her inseparable art and human natures was a stone of water so pure and so blue that in her very brilliance she needed peculiar backgrounds, and in her very instincts of unpremeditated emotion, automatically acquired them.

Not only was his attitude devotional, but it had been so from the first time he had seen and heard her. Even to-day, withal his permitted nearness to her, the fact of his privileges did not for any instant wear down his sense of grateful favouredness.

That "first time he had seen and heard her" had been "among the people," that concrete yet vague locality wherein she herself, strangely yet characteristically, seemed, by some mental means of placing herself there, most happy—on that day when she had for the first time in the United States sung her famous "Traviata."

This growingly famous Arnold Rutgers was, in his own right, not so much an unusual man as an unusual art-man, for though art's sun and moon may have risen for him, they did not likewise set for him, in painting—he loved art, therefore all arts. Albeit a disciple of pencil, brush and canvas, he loved the art of taut-pulled string and sounding metals and chiselled human voice. Painting may have been for him all the breath of self-expressing life; but he broadly, charitably knew that it was not the whole breath of art-life, as again that breath was not the whole power of simple unqualified Life. And next in devotion with him to his own art-parent, he loved the art-parent Music.

To "La Traviata" went Arnold Rutgers habitually, exactly as goes a child to a migratory, periodic *carrousel*, knowing that by proper dint of journey and expenditure there is to find a diamond in a tinsel oyster.

That first time he had seen and heard Wanda de l'Etoile, it had come across his mind with a certain lonely *timbre* of thought—almost bleakly, like the thin shafts

of winter sunlight filtering into the gallery that his whim of the day had chosen—come with a sense of unfamiliarity, nearly of loneliness, that he was hearing the big hand-organ epic of flesh-pot and soul-yearn as if he had never heard it before—as if he must brace his mind, his nerves, to draw within himself all that could be drawn to build a perfect memory of all that he was yet to hear.

The impression, penetrant, suggestive, had come to him as Wanda had sunk down on the rococo couch near the right wings. "*Mano derecha*," she had termed it afterward, and the trivial phrase had lingered always in his brain as she had spoken it—like a snatch of melody.

Debonairly she had carried on Nellie Melba's blithe reform of the New York institution's outré version of "The Lady of the Camellias," and debonairly she had entered, a lovely Violeta in swaying and rosetted crinoline, together with an added whim of her own, namely, on the arm of a cavalier—a great lady in her pathetic achievement of mood, and a great lady dressed for an occasion, too, befanned and décolletée and radiant, her posture and gait and costume, the swing and the rhythm and sway of them, suggesting a ship for its stateliness, but a cockleshell craft for its daintiness.

An impulsive, self-hushing ripple had gone through the *matinée* house, and had she sung not a note she would have been, already and past dispute, the Diva, the Prima Donna *in excelcís*.

And it is possible that Violeta had never been as greatly sung as it was that day.

Arnold Rutgers, at least, was certain that it had not. In the end of the ball-room scene, in the shower of bitter money, both the man in him and the artist in him quivered with something very like a shudder. Afterward, he could not remember whether it was through hearing or through sight, by the singing or by the look of her, that he had been momentarily soul-stricken. But there had been something more than any Marguerite, than any Violeta, in the tragic flower of those few instants' pouring music

and flashing vision of her. The intellect guiding that voice and that soul had through the bruising tinkle of that money-shower propelled some terrible thing root-deep in the universe, and the electricity of it had coursed not only to Arnold Rutgers but through the whole vast building.

Also afterward, he laughed himself away from the imaginative thought that the nameless communication held some obscure fatality for him.

Yet even now, remembering, he trembled a little, even here, among her household deities of golden-handled pen, delicate fabric, slender, richly tapestried chairs, glinting bits of Toledo, while he marvelled at the fortune of his nearness—and of her own familiar nearness, on the other side, to the boundary that she drew.

He had sought her swiftly, consciously presuming, yet determinedly. When at last he had met her, crowded at her in a chattering, eager, infuriating reception-line, he knew that her moment's hand-clasp and glance were for only his own memory, not for hers, that his time, effort, anxiety to this silly end had been wasted. And when ultimately he was successful, it had been through the simple expedient of a card with "Business" pencilled below his name, and an explanation five minutes later, poured forth from the inwardly bent knees of his luck, that he must—he used no further word—paint her.

His mind had leaped after her mind as, through interview after interview, a delicacy here, an intellectual, half-inexpressed prejudice there, prevented one costume, another.

Traviata—and upon this very natural initial choosing, for a brief instant they had thought they had it. But after that brief instant she had shaken her head in the serious, lovely movement that he had later come to know by heart.

"Traviata now is mine, friend, I truly believe of all the world. Yes, since that performance here, that one you heard, truly I believe it. But Traviata—my poor, poor Violeta!—I am never letting her alone! Ah, with

your profession, you will understand—I am forever painting her! And I would prefer someone else did not paint my Wayward One until I have finished!”

And at this, after his own even briefer instant of fear that he faced an actress's temperamentalism, there had for the first time come into his eyes that curious shine.

. . . The first facet. . . .

Mimi—and something like a sad memory shot her look. “No. That I would like. But Mimi is Melba's. Mimi never can be mine as she is hers.”

One deferment, and he was glad of more, for they had led her to say: “You will—if you will—see me in many parts, for there is a whole winter of them before us.” And his eager questions had brought about for him rare, memory-storing glimpses of her exquisite costumes.

Over the suggested vision of her impending Kundry, they had both stood enthralled—he at the daring imaginativeness of its delicately poignant colours, its clusters, its very horns of jewellery invoking to the brain some beast of Apocalypse; she, in delight at his breathless appreciation, and for a long moment nearly tempted.

But again, and suddenly, she had shaken her head. This had been the case of her delicacy; though she had said, and had looked at him with utter unconcern as she said it: “Never Kundry. For you can see from this, as Kundry, friend, I am shockingly, dreadfully, nearly naked!”

Carmen—and a bright, grave light had filled her eyes.

“That *truly* tempts me. But Bréval has been painted as Carmen, as Carmen will probably never be painted again!” Her casual, offhand knowledge of the picture—for this, too, was early in their knowledge of each other—had delighted him. “And also, Mr. Rutgers, Carmen would never show me as I a—as I desire to be.”

And at last she had said one day, turning to him abruptly with something more pregnant, more deep and even more mysterious in her manner than he had ever before discovered in it: “I have decided, if you will humour me. No costume *at all*. Do not look so amazed! I mean,

anything you may choose out of what you have seen upon me here at home. Yet, Mr. Rutgers, in a character dearer to my heart than any other. Paint me, please, as *a lady*."

And Arnold Rutgers's "Wanda de l'Etoile," indeed the portrait of a lady, hangs now in the Metropolitan, quite near the Zuloaga Bréval.

But to-day, as he stood so gently, so wonderingly in the faded light by her small beautiful desk, it was hanging in his studio, where it bulked dimly, subtly in his daily life as might a shrine to a devout Catholic.

When he had first determined to know her and had set with so stubborn a fever to the task of it, he had not paused long enough to ask himself if he was in love with her. When he did take breath to ask himself seriously that, he had been as feverishly glad to own it.

Now, with the innermost beauty of Wanda's demanded fine distinction, he was not "in" love with her; he loved her. As, standing so near to her hidden little red book, he was imaginatively phrasing the great fact to himself, that fact of love, a fact great enough to attain the stature and the miraculous nature of a truth, had come into its fulsome golden being in him with all the gradualness, yet sudden glory, of a sunrise. . . .

"But, Arno, it is perfectly dark! It is black, winter night! I do not see you, even! Why did you not turn on the light?"

CHAPTER XXIX

LET THE DEAD PAST BURY ITS DEAD

SHE was serving him, gracefully, attentively, after her gentle foreign woman's fashion—a fashion that had forbidden him to fetch and carry, even to trundle in for her the “curate's-assistant” with its surplice of lace and silver, its weight of wine and food. When he had heard her voice from the doorway he had answered her, through the room's darkness, “Because I was thinking of light, Wanda. Of a light greater than electricity or even sun. And if you were looking at the mirror you would see me, Wanda. I can see the gleam of your eyes in it, even with your head turned away; and you would see that gleam reflected in mine.”

She had laughed softly.

“You are not an American, Arno, after all! You say impossible, pretty things!”

Then she had felt for the switch and flooded the room with a suave radiance—of the tenderly tinted shades, of her roseate figure, its décolletée frock of rich petal-colour.

The gown, her neck, her hair were gleaming now, beyond the rose-drenched candelabra. He was sure he had never seen anyone, not Wanda herself, more lovely, in a lovelier moment. He had never known anyone who could transform, with the gesture of a wine-glass or the delicate passing of a dish, the essence of a markedly informal supper to that of a function. Thus her art touched, seemingly, everything. Supper with her was a combination of the intimate with the stately; the familiar with the decorous; the simple with the elaborate; the sketched with the pigmented. And that, despite her in-

triguing little oblique excuse, was why she had dressed for it. Vanity? Facets! . . .

"Oh, Wanda," he exclaimed suddenly, hunting in his jacket, "I've found that criticism that tickled me so! Read it." And he handed her a clipped bit of newspaper.

"Thank you, Arno. My curiosity about myself is never used up!"

Wanda studied it slowly, puzzling carefully over some of the words.

"Maggie used to swim and dandle flowers under Cosima——"

She looked up, her face blank. "Maggie—swim—Frau Wagner's first name? Why, Arno, this means *nothing*! Is it a crazy person?"

"Read on," he smiled.

"Maggie used to swim and dandle flowers under Cosima; one may put it so in order to exactly place the dramatic semicolon in front of her appearance here among us, where, when she swims, it is not as a Rhine Maiden, but as a comet into our ken; where she is no longer dandling flowers among the chorus, but floating among the stars. In other words, she is no longer Maggie, but Wanda de l'Etoile, helping to make the music of the spheres."

Again Wanda looked up. "But my name was never Maggie!"

Again he smiled. "Read on."

"This writer heard Maggie when she was a squawky flower-girl at Bayreuth. If her name was not Maggie, it was doubtless the equivalent of it in the land of her birth—just one indistinguishable name in a list of six or a dozen bracketed names who swam, or threw flowers, or ejaculated with spears and bridled with tall white pinions for famous Brünnhildes. Yet in that nameless, squawky, sixth or doventh voice there was the mysterious, unforgettable something that haunts, that one never forgets, that sings not: 'Ho-yo-to-ho!' but 'I am the new generation! I shall sing Brünnhilde one day as she does not!' Such was Wanda de l'Etoile. What she is now, what she was last night, the world knows."

Lost in thought, Wanda creased the bit of printing between her fingers.

"Arno," she said presently, "I am not now surprised you were 'tickled' at this, being my friend. For it is kind. It appreciates. Here in America, despite I would not pay bribes because I would think it wicked, as did that too stout Brünnhilde who thence had to go home, still there has been so much kindness! Oh, so much! Yet I confess that all of this I do not understand. I do not see what fun he had to call me Maggie!"

"What *was* your name, Wanda?"

"At Bayreuth? I do not remember what I there called myself, scarcely any more than this writer does. Several dreadful German things, out of manners to the country. I was there one year, for training. And it did what you call "worlds" for me. Yet I think God Himself was surprised at me for wanting to sing the German tongue. My wars with it have paid me two things. One, that when I have sung it, which will now be soon, I will be called the greatest Kundry. I have that conviction. The other, that they have prepared me perhaps—*perhaps*—one day to sing—Isolde! Who sent me to Bayreuth really was—Isolde!"

With the rich word, softly, richly spoken, there was a far-off look in her eyes, as if it named a far-off time.

"Yes," said Arnold Rutgers, a far-off look in his eyes too, and a queer quiver in his voice, "how you could sing Isolde!"

"Perhaps, Arno, perhaps. What a test! For I am more ambitious than even you dream of, dear friend as you are. And for reasons that you do not know—dear friend as you are. Arno, I utterly wish to be great—truly, greatly great!"

"But you are already great! Truly great! The slow, unwilling world says so!"

"I am not Melba."

"But you are Wanda de l'Etoile."

"I have not Melba's voice, Arno."

"And Melba has not your soul."

"You must not say that, Arno. Melba kissed me once, and I think it was the greatest moment of my life. . . . No, not of my life, but of my career. I had sung *Bohême*, and when I saw her sitting in the house, enough by itself to frighten any human soul to death, it—it reminded me of something . . . of one night in Paris. . . . Arno, I did not know how or what I sang the rest of the act. And when she asked to see me in my dressing-room, and told me how I had sung, and I looked in her lovely face and knew she did not pity me, but was telling me the truth, I cried and cried enough to spoil my voice for a week, except that joy never spoils anything. One thing she said was, 'People have said a singer needs three things, Voice, Voice, Voice.' That itself was another strange memory for me, for that had been said to me once, when the whole great way of my life—my *Gran Via*—was prophesied for me. And then she said, 'I have those three things. If I had *your soul*, I would be the greatest singer in the world.' . . . Arno, could there be a greater soul than the soul that, even out of an ecstatic, queenly moment, to someone who was seeking and struggling, would say *that*?"

They were silent for a time; then Arnold said gently:

"And the soul that is greater than any I have known, has pointed a moral and adorned a pretty tale, to make me forget to ask again what its earthly name was when it was a heavenly child. Is not that so?" Wanda's "is nots" had infected the American.

"Why should you wish to know what my name was, Arno?"

"Because I long to know everything about you."

"Ah!" Wanda shook her head with a strange, sad smile. "No, very dear friend. You would be sorry if you did know. You—you idealize me."

"I do not idealize you, I idolize you."

"Arno, Arno, you must not say that!" She cried it, almost, pain vibrant in her exquisite voice. "Listen to

me: you and Daisy are my nearest and dearest of my life just now—you, more even than Daisy, because it is wonderful to me to have a friend in a good man, and you are the only one of that kind that I have had in all my life—except, and different again, my Maestro. It is possible here in the States. In my native country it would be, I think, not possible—again except, for instance, my beloved Maestro. Shall you change all that, and make my life more empty, by offering me something I would have no right to take?”

“Why no right, Wanda? You tell me so over and over, but without saying *why*, except vaguely, sadly that there is a good reason. That *I* have no right even to beg you, would seem reasonable enough, for I have nothing to offer that is great enough for you, except my love. But you say that is not it. Tell me, Wanda: great as you are, beyond other people, something higher than most things of the world, yet with a *great* love offered you, would you not think of marriage? Would you never think of it at all?”

“Arno,” she said, her eyes grave and dreamy, her voice very slow, “there was a time when I did not—could not—think of marriage for myself—at all. Even far ahead. Could not afford it in any way soever. But here, things are such a different spirit from the spirit at home that I have sometimes thought—I am trying to say, I have changed a little—a *little*—in what is named here the ‘point of view.’ I have thought that perhaps I did have that right. I mean, that I might have it in certain circumstances. But I am not yet sure in that point of view. It is young with me, like a baby that might grow up to astonish one in some way. For I have had it only since I have come to America.”

Arnold smiled, his troubled gravity broken for a moment.

“Not ‘came,’ dear, ‘come.’”

“‘Come’? Thank you, Arno. Since I come here.”

“Not ‘since I come,’ Wanda dear, but ‘*have* come.’”

"But that is what I said to begin, Arno! Are you never satisfied? I think you are not so clever as you pretend! 'Did come' is in the book, and when one day I have said 'Since I did come to America' you chose to know better than the book and told me 'came,' and to-night I have begun with 'came,' and you tell me 'come'! What am I to believe?"

"Never mind, dear," laughed Arnold.

"But I mind very much!" cried Wanda indignantly. "You know I am proud of my cleverness at languages, yet you must confuse me for ever!"

"Let's return to your 'point of view,' dear. That's more important than your English."

"'Let's'! 'That's'! I am sure those are poor enough English! Well, since I have come here, I have seen this different spirit about what is right and what is wrong. You are the greatest people in the world in some ways—the most open and charitable, I think. But, Arno, to demand all the charity of a big nation from one individual of it, even the sweetest and kindest, would be too much. Comprends tu moi?"

"Dear," said Arnold Rutgers, leaning across the glowing table and placing his darker hand on the fingers that lay white upon the white cloth, shining in its rosy light, "—dear—and surely you must let me call you so when you have used the foreign 'thou' to me—you should never, in speaking to me of ourselves, use the word charity. You like to have lessons in English; here is a lesson deeper and greater than all of grammar: 'Charity' is the cruellest, most terrible word in the English tongue!"

"It—it was not cruel to me, Arno," she said, "the first time my mind came upon it with real thought of its meaning. Charities—'Mercedes'—was the name of a beautiful old woman—I think she was old, old as words, I know she was beautiful, beautiful as words—who saved my life one pitiable night—pitiable? Pitiful too!—who prophesied for me my Great Way. She is the one I have spoken to you when we talked of Melba just now. Cruel?"

Mercedes was not cruel, Arno; she only was truthful with me, fully truthful, as I am trying with you to be?"

"The virtues of charity," he answered quietly, "are that it 'suffereth long and is kind.' I would suffer long for you, Wanda. Till doomsday, I would be kind to you. Yet '*charity*'? Who am I that I should be charitable to you? When I've told you I loved you and wanted to marry you, have you demanded what my life has been? If it has even occurred to you to wonder, has it occurred to you to ask? Never. . . . Dear, have *I* ever asked *you*?"

Her eyes were dim and did not look at him as she whispered: "Yes, even to-night, Arno."

"Wanda! Wanda! Could you have understood it so? You didn't! *That* was uncharitable, from you to me! I said I longed to know your name, to know the little, early things, to picture you as a child!"

"I know! I know! That was unkind from me to you! It was a little bit of wicked bitterness. Forgive me! Dear, dear friend, I see that we must at last talk seriously of this marriage matter. I have hoped we need not. . . . Arno, I believe with all my heart that no matter what I told you of myself, you would say, 'I do not care, Wanda.' You would still say, 'You are so great and famous, and my love for you is so great and complete, that for us there is not this strange difference that God has made to be, or perhaps only allowed to be, between what a man may do and what a woman may do.' I believe that you would say that. But even if I could say it with you, Arno, praying that my past—my '*past*' the way it is called in italics and in quotation marks—through God's mercy might never, never rise to strike you on the face, still there would be two reasons. Two great reasons. And one of them is, here am I a singer, an artista, a famous one to be sure, a cantatriz, to climb further up in my native tongue, but still an artista, sprung up from the people—of an old line in my dear country, yet a line sunk down in the people. And you

are a gentleman. You are an aristocrat. Your name would measure with the names of nobles in my country, mine measures with your aristocracy here only as a printed one at the Opera. And of your family, you, Arno, are what you call the 'scion.'"

"Wanda," he said earnestly, trembling with a hope unfelt before, "granting the right or wrong of all that, don't you know what my family consists of? My younger sister. No one else, absolutely no one!"

"What a boy you are, dear friend! You are at times such as this, so like a boy that it makes me ashamed to keep you even for my close, friendly friend!"

"I may be, Wanda, to you, though I'm older than you."

"With a sister twenty, you have told me. Arno, we must not forget that sister! How little you know women! That is why I have called you 'what a boy.' She would know in a day what you would not discover in a lifetime! Arno, I believe in God's name that to-day, to-night—I am as truly, purely worthy to marry—even you—in most ways, as—as a woman—with—without——"

"I understand, dear."

"Yet, Arno, that old life is history, if it is not present truth. And even if that sister of yours could not read as most women can read, must you not think of her?"

"My dear," he said, with a quietness deeply serious but untroubled, "my sister has not thought of me in that sense. American brothers and sisters are very independent, Wanda. They are willing to love each other without demands and dominations. Let me tell you something!" And his eyes shone with his one little victory for which he had used one of her little phrases. "You know my sister is in Paris, with friends. She at twenty has become engaged to someone I never saw, never before heard of. Wanda, I've written her and written her about you. She would love you—and not for my sake either, believe me, but for your own, her own. If I don't know women, Wanda, I know one woman—my

sister. She has written me, 'She must be lovely, very lovely.' And another time, 'I believe you're at last in love, Arnold. And it's high time.' While of this man, Wanda, to whom she's entrusted her life, her name—our name, as your thoughts would deal with it—she writes only that she loves him—pages pouring out that, with 'handsome' in every other line. And at the end what do I know of him? That he's handsome. And I couldn't go on the witness-stand, my dear, as to that. And am I shocked or angry? No. Because I trust her. Would she question my right, my judgment? No. Because she trusts me. Wanda——" and his hand tightened upon hers and his voice quivered into low intensity—"Wanda, will you marry me?"

She drew her hand slowly away and rested her chin in the hollow of it, lowering her eyes and turning partly from him.

"The chances are in favour of this man. . . . Chances are always in favour of men! . . . Probably your little sister, whom you trust, will give you no reason to regret that trust. But that very same matter of trust—the very point and nature of it, Arno! How of her trust in you? Shall you, deliberately, bring into her life, as her lawful sister, a—Oh, I *do* know some English!—a—*demi-rep*?"

The word leapt out as if to strike him.

"Wanda!" he cried.

"Did it hurt you?" She sprang up with hot, passionate tears. "I *said* it to hurt you! I wanted to know if you still would beg me to marry you!"

He too had sprung up.

"I do beg you to marry me! I love you!"

"It was sweet to have a good man ask and ask me! I said it to have all the sweetness of that—all—before I said utterly 'No'!"

"Why do you say no? Why?" He tried to take her in his arms but she struggled away.

"Did I not say there were two reasons? You have struck down only one! Shall I tell you that other? How

cruel I was—how charitable, with your definition!—not to tell it first!”

“What is it? Tell me, Wanda! Tell me!”

She turned toward him with her cheeks yet wet, but her eyes passionless, bright merely with the dry light of tense fervour.

“Dearest, closest friend, it is that I—that I do not love you. Oh, I love you indeed—indeed! But not *so*, not *so*! It is not that way! It is not the *great* way! It is not *La Gran Via*!”

With hands tight clenched, she again turned away her eyes.

He came up behind her and placed his gentle hands upon her shoulders.

“I have known you did not love me—that way. I do not ask you to. I ask you to marry me. It might be—afterward. It *might* grow! I ask only the *chance* of its growing. Wanda, be my wife! Be the bearer of my name that you put so high! Make me proud that you would take that gift! Bear not only that—be the mother of my children!”

“I do not deserve them!” she whispered, striving to keep erect the head that he strove to draw against his heart.

“Think of it, Wanda! Think a little while, just a little while, before you say ‘utterly no’! Dear, I can tell what your lovely mind keeps going back to—more, so much more than it should!—that word, and all you meant by it. Dear, again your own pretty expression, ‘let me tell you something’: You are always crying out for people, Wanda. ‘*The*’ people. Dear, there is a line of verse that a people’s poet wrote for the people, and that stands out beyond the power of the rest of all his simple verses for all people, high and low, to read. Dearest, that message is: ‘*Let the dead past bury its dead.*’ Will you think of that for a little, Wanda? For just a little, before saying ‘Utterly no’?”

She drew away from him, and turned, and let her

hands slip down his sleeves till they caught his fingers.

"How wonderful you are!" she said, looking in his eyes. "Yes, I will promise you—so much!"

"Then I will leave you, dear. I know that with you a promise is a sacred thing. It needs no tying. Oh—one moment!"

Again his hand went into his jacket pocket where the newspaper clipping had been.

"Wanda, will you let me give you this? I have never given you anything but flowers. Something, not words, but something from you, has said that flowers must be the only thing from me. But you have given *me* so much, Wanda! You *will* accept this?"

And a soft cry at the beauty came from her as there sped, from his finger-tips to her instinctively uplifted ones, and hung between them glittering, a string of beads—a rosary of carven gold and crystal.

Momentarily, she stood spellbound, with æsthetic delight and with memory—memories of the gypsy again, when between her and the woman named Charities had hung thus pendant and glittering—in firelight—a string of beads; of Isabel, when between her and the girl named Sacrament thus had hung drooping and shining—in sunlight—a string of beads. But for the old glow and wonder of old wondrous Egypt then and there, were a white pure glitter and new miracle from these rose-cut pebbles of Brazil silently tinkling with lights like dew-drops, falling in their sunny gold chain to her pink fingers here and now.

Their thought, their symbol, their colour of a miniature cascade, seemed to span a gulf. And her first words of hesitation, softly spoken, were amusing, and were sad.

"For me—a rosary!—You know I am not a strict goer to churches, Arno!"

"I have neither known nor cared," he said, "—nor thought! They have beauty—your kind of beauty. They're from a famous collection. They're from your country. They're very old, like Spain. They were in the Guzman

family. Perhaps Eugénie knew them. But first and last, they look like you. They *are* like you. They are what you are to me. You *will* have them?"

Mist mingled with the light in her eyes. Yet hard as he was, harder than the stones, to resist, still resistance came from her.

"Would it not be—Arno——"

"A chain—chaining your promise to you? Did I not say I knew that needed no binding? Can you think that, when I forgot this thing in my pocket, and remembered, in that same pocket, the newspaper clipping?"

"Then——"

And she let it come from his fingers to her own . . . indeed fair, delicate as drops of dew on a sunbeam, indeed, as just such a dream translated into matter as it massed smally, creamily on to the shell-pink palm of her hand.

And having allowed this, her words were replete with acceptance.

"How *completely* lovely! I do not know very much about rosaries, Arno. Indeed not as much as the very worst Spaniard should. But whatever my faiths and feelings, yet are rosaries to me one of the most beautiful thoughts ever in the world—chaplets, chaplets of jewels, or, like these, even gems, clung to by armies of æsthetized thoughts.—How careful I was to pronounce that word slowly, and how prettily I succeeded upon it, too! —But this much that is churchly, I do remember, that mysteries attach on them, on rosaries, Arno—churchly or not, all of our mysteries that our lives can have: the Joyful, the Dolorous, the Glorious. What more, in the whole Great Way? The Joyful, the *Sorrowful*, the Glorious; but I chose your word dolorous because so near to our own dear 'Dolores,' so soft, so sweet, so sad, and that our people will name people, little, helpless girl-people, so thoughtfully, and thoughtlessly, and terribly! Yes, the Joyful, the Sorrowful, the Glorious, our mysteries; I ask you, Arno, what further ones, in the whole

Great Way? And my own odd, personal thoughts put miracles to them, too. I do not remember whether mysteries and miracles concern each other in churches. But the words seem kindred. And whether from the word—for I am peculiarly fond of words—whether just from the word rosary, or from something I have read, always I concern with them a Miracle of Roses. It is something about Saint Isabel—for again a word, a name, has happened to make me read more about that saint than any other! This rosary at least, Arno, if no other rosary, is truly a little miracle of roses!"

She was still holding it caressingly, lifting it with her fingers, letting it fall and form again with soft heaviness on her palm; and he made no answer for he felt a further thought coming from her and presently her pensive steady eyes drew his to one of the room's suavely tinted pictures.

"How strange a thing, association of ideas! Murillo. . . . I said to-night, my trials with the German tongue had paid me two things, and that may have sounded that I gained no more in Germany. But no. I discovered suddenly that picture there, Arno—the real, the original, I mean. If I have memories of any painting, I have, and I *had* had, of that, my beloved Saint Francis of Padua. Memories from my earliest home, which was Cadiz. Memories, through one terrible reminding night of it, from Sevilla. Memories from a more than terrible moment of a black hour in a Moorish church in the foothills of the Pirenéos. I did not recognize the message then, but Murillo in all those different moments, joyful, dolorous, as in after moments glorious, was speaking to me, *trying* to speak to me, through the vast distances of his vaporoso, of *Art*. Well, it was in Berlin that I suddenly found out where was that great loved Murillo of my Spain's. When I could have known for years for the asking, I suppose, or for the looking in a book. Yet that instant's transport back along the Gran Via as through the vaporoso to my home, taught me more I

think than a book, or great many of questions. Of such things is one's art so much made up—and to you, can I talk in this way so much more with understanding paid me back, than with anyone else, Arno! Association of ideas! There is a danger in it! Here in Nueva York, I went to see the wonderful Rodins—in a mood of homesickness for Paris one day, and taking Daisy, a fatal measure, but yet learning the 'Main de Dieu,' for all my love of it before, as never before, because 'at home' in the Luxembourg it is bronze, here in your wealth it is a spiritual wealth of marble. And from that wondrous marble too, I learned to love the 'Cupid and Psyche,' which I had never loved because other Cupid-and-Psyches were to me sentimental, were love without depth, shallow, like the expression 'falling in love,' 'being in love.' There was *wrong* association of ideas, you see—it had made me mistake and neglect this pure beautiful Rodin one—from which the pure marble for a moment chanced in charity to me to wipe the interfering, sentimental wings away—away from my brain, I mean, not from the statue, thank God! But shall I teach *you* Art, Arno? Only, it is that of such things, such moments, I suppose, that we—our finally painted souls—are made; of things like that Murillo, and this little Miracle of Roses! And the strange little thought I started for, and have but just arrived to, is, ah, association of ideas indeed! Arno, you have asked gently, sweetly about my very early life. Well, the little street that I was born in, in little Cadiz, was—the Rosario!"

And lifting the dewy and golden miracle she dropped it around her throat, where it lay glinting on the white neck above the roseate frock.

Very gently, he made no answer to all that she had said, except:

"You sing to-morrow night, Wanda?"

"Yes."

"Traviata!"

"Yes."

He smiled, a curious quality of tenderness in his smile. "You will not let that disturb you? Promise me!"

She hesitated. "The——"

"The 'Camille' notion—that distant sister in the story. You see, dear, I understand your over-impressionable mind so well! You will not let that influence you?"

"N-no."

"I will be there. The whole of New York hasn't a camellia. Gardenias?"

"Gardenias!" She had almost started. And again in her eyes a little shadow struggled with the light. "I—I love them even more. Something like them, we call at home jacintas."

"Jacintas, then. Good night, dear."

"Good night—Arno."

She stood for a long time gazing out into the darkness; first seeing him walk away, then wondering when the night's quiet would be broken by the hoot of a motor fetching Daisy, or the hoot of Elise learning the news of her hat.

"She has stayed late, after all. She will be 'in love' with Dmitri, when she comes in. Dio, Dio, how many people in the world know what is love?"

She began to walk and walk, to pace through and through the lustrous room, her hands at her temples—occasionally with a scarcely conscious gesture lifting the rosary and holding a little measure of the dewy beads across her forehead, as if their coolness helped concentration of thought. At last she paused beside the little Sheraton desk, and stood there, her face raised, her fingers feverishly hesitating on the key.

CHAPTER XXX

THE LITTLE RED BOOK AGAIN

MY own, be close, be near to me to-night! I am in great need! Suddenly, I am in great need! Be with me!

I need my faith in my love for you. I need it as I have never needed it until now! I need my faith in myself! I feel the need to write down in words my love for you, that I may see it before me with my own eyes! Yes, I, *I* have such a need—I, whose pride in my love and my fidelity to my love was absolute. My own, I cannot tell you why—not now. My brain is too hot and sick at myself. My need is to tell you and tell you, again and again, that my love remains—unalterable, unequalled! . . . Yes, unalterable! . . . I turn to the great beloved exquisite fact of it, as a doubtful ship to a rocket, or the North star. O my Caballero of the Moon, guide me!

O my José, José Luis, I must try to-night more than ever before in my little book to tell you what you are to me, what my love is to me, what the miraculous possibility of your love means to me!

My own, my José, since the old too-short days I have learned much of many things, and among it all, I have learned much of words—some of the much that in those days I so thirsted to know. And do you know what you were to me so long ago—what my sudden love was to me?

Oh, my own, my own, to-night, with something of that desired much of words, and in our sweet, dear Spanish, one thing that is together yours and mine, dear, and with all of my little studies and self-decorations taken away from me, I will tell you what you were, and what *it* was.

You and that love were Epiphany. "Epiphany," so mysterious, so mystical and beautiful, has a simple meaning, José Luis. It means simply "manifestation," simply "appearance." My sudden vision of love was to me an Epiphany on the road, the Great Road. And as it is so hard, so very hard, to separate the feeling from what it feels for, to me *you* were the Epiphany, the bright light.

And later, when the Great Road had led me on into the wilderness, and I travelled blindly there, in its confusion and its seeming endlessness, alone and with no eyes to direct me, another thing of beautiful religious symbol happened: a great voice came crying in the wilderness, the voice of God, and it proved (oh, thanks to God!) to be my own great voice, and made straight my way! Yet had I been asleep in the wilderness, could I have heard that voice? No. And all the time I had been kept awake, my darling, by the bright light, by the bright light of Epiphany, of *you*, shining all that while for me in the desolation!

And where am I now? O, Dio, Dio, where am I now? Surely I am no longer in the wilderness! Then where am I? Am I in the valley of death, the valley of the shadow of death? Does one more such symbol confront me, and am I in some bad valley?

Ah, my own, my own! Let my vision of you be closely, securely with me now! I am told, dear, that with some who love, the faces of the dearest-absent are difficult to conjure. That sorrow, I have never had. I can always clearly, dearly see you, my José Luis. And something tells me that my vision of you this moment is as you *are* this moment—that you have not changed. I think that the sand-grains of the uncounted hours have fallen lightly on you. I think that they are written on your face, but in very pretty, educated writing. . . .

O my own, where am I? To where, to what, do I go? Am I indeed in the Valley of the Shadow now, am I entering some grave and terrible place in the Gran Via such as the enormous shadowy fissure cleft by God in the

Sacred Mountain, up, up, beyond the convent, the famous and awful Valle Malo? . . . Am I there? . . .

O my own Epiphany, shine for me still in my Gran Via, as you did then on the road, as you did in the wilderness when I was wandering through it—come to me still closely in my dreams, shine brightly for me—if this is indeed my Bad Valley, and not something lesser, shine brightly for me through my Valle Malo!

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CHAPTER XXXI

THE WARM SHADOW

SEVERAL matters were happily out of place—happily, because they were not homeless, nor even away from home. Merely they had moved to new tenements.

One of these was Madame de l'Etoile's little red books. They had left the "living-room" and lived now in what their owner said should be called, if the English tongue had logic, the dying-room—her bed-chamber. This had removed them from the meandering and audible neighbourhood of the Princess Daisy, who never ventured upon Madame de l'Etoile's privacy here—unless to waken her in the dead of night to some new brand of foolishness about Dmitri, or in the morning, hours before breakfast, to ask if she had any embroidery silk number 3-x Blush-of-Malta grade one, and a few moments later to say it was so funny that Wanda did not like to embroider, for occupation if nothing else, and that Wanda's reply that she embroidered her voice was meaningless, at least in English, though it might have some cruel, oblique, insinuating significance in Spanish; or in the afternoon during Wanda's siesta, to look under the bed for "The Apples of Jacquot-Jacquette," on the chance that the last time she dropped them they might have rolled there from the next room and past Madame de l'Etoile without that self-centred singer having noticed it. Other than this the princess did not here intrude. But this great advantage to the little red books had not come about through any raw, rude purpose of the diva. It had precipitated through the receipt of a surprising and delightful package at the hotel to-day.

Another of the matters beautifully out of place was

Madame de l'Etoile herself. Indeed, she was at the Opera. Routine enough; routine such as breath or bread. But she was in a rôle pristinely new to her. Again, the very nativity-air of temperament. But it was a rôle in an arduously foreign tongue; and in the prejudgment of her vast audience the star was a billion miles—general astronomical statistics—away from anything she had any business to be doing—embroidery, for instance.

The third matter out of place, and much further out than either Madame de l'Etoile or her book, was an Italian in the United States. (This Italian.)

He was at the Opera just now, theoretically an ideal surrounding for him while thus so far from home; but he was shivering, shivering from head to foot, with an emotion whose external show upon him was as if every *forte* phrase of the drama of sound were an attack of German blacksmiths on his body.

And even the opera itself this day, according to a tradition never yet quite forgotten by the old and cranky, was as out of place as anything in the wide art-world could be, for it was indigenous, and according to scripture immolate, to Bayreuth; while here, in New York's greatest theatre, crammed with more strata of humanity than were numbered by the layers of the huge house itself, its most unique and most singularly periodic audience, vibrant with all social symbolisms from gang to Gethsemane, the great Grail tragedy of holiness and lust intoned and gonged its strange, diverse, and sonorous panoramic way.

And when the winter afternoon had slipped into full winter night, the long functional intermission gone past and the second act disclosed its weird opening mystery of evilly imaginative castle of half Moorish and half magic architecture, the lone Italian was not the only man in the house who shivered. Far across from him, and in the gentleness of his love for a friend tolerating a very weary and wearying little "Royalty" at his side, was Arnold Rutgers. Klingsor was calling "Kundry, here! Kundry,

here!" and it was with all the mingled expectancy and fear of a *précieux* that he sat waiting for her answering, uncannily dreadful screams.

For these few brief moments were, among many favourite moments of the long strange opera, the most favourite with him.

And as this woman emitted the fearful tones, he turned quite cold.

His shudder was not that of the sheer satisfaction of a sensuous hope not merely appeased, but overwhelmed, as by that handful of long-drawn terrible cries of damnation his had been. The chilling thrill held much more. Nor was the rest of it but the shiver gleaned from *Traviata*, with its intuitional sense of fatality for him. Recurrent, that had gripped him; but—he had not loved her then. . . . And now . . . God pity who loved her whom she did not love. . . . Yet in the rapid fire—ice-fire—of his flashing thoughts he escaped the absurdity of his imagination only to shudder anew at the intellectual quality of genius propelling the art with which she had not sung, nor screamed, but created those cries, at the horrible consciousness through which this new singer, replete with youthfulness in all but her art, had with hot streaks of searing passion not endowed, but explained, the fierce woman of bleeding laughter. . . .

As she had sunk moaning out of vision as into the pit, he had closed his eyes, to hoard with sharp inner impress the brief picture of her. In the white shrouding robe, cast upon by its veiling strange blue light, she had been more than ever before—and moreover for the first time to his literal visual sense—the white stone of pure blue water of his imagination. A pure stone, limpid. But a pure stone with the purple hoot of hell in it. Facets. . . . He knew, now, how his night would be spent after these next hours were done and he had fetched home the wilting little flower at his side and tucked her into the groom of the hotel. They would be spent walking the streets . . . walking. . . . And when his eyes opened the

enchanted and enchanting glum castle had vanished, Kundry's sun-drenched narcotic paradise realmed the vast stage, and another moment for which he had lived almost breathlessly to-night was imminent before him. The murmurous rhapsody of the flowery maidens sank away . . . and *she* was before him . . . and the unfolding moment made him breathless for an instant quite entirely, despite his warning from his glimpsing taste of it beforehand. For it both was and was not she before him. In that exquisite outcry of colours and jewel-lights and imaginative forms exotically habiting the white lovely figure, glowed the heavenly harlot, the doomed irrevocable whore and snake and smiling opiate of the ages. . . . While before the strange woman de l'Etoile lay the hours of her own test, not Parsifal's, of her battle magnificent, not his. Hours. . . .

Through them, the peaceful little drawing-room at home, robbed of even its warm little red leather books, waited as it had done since quite early afternoon, empty of life, even of the sad life of Jacquot-Jacquette, who was shivering like Mr. Rutgers and the Italian at the Opera; empty even of sound, save the ticking of a clock, and, hourly, another and inexcusable noise from the same instrument. For it was a cuckoo-like and foolish clock, that every hour, as if an exact moment made any difference about unhappiness, opened its door and protested, whether anyone was there or not; a cuckoo-like but not a cuckoo clock, for the little bird who stepped out of it had a lyre-bird's tail, and like the roost it lived in was so trivial and so dainty, so silly and so like the little princess that upon that personage's frantic infatuation for it Wanda had gratefully and shamelessly made it over to her. In the little bird's throat was a little voice, that also came out, just like the little bird itself, and said anything from one to twelve, as the case might be, in a sound of silver innocence. It would have needed an enormous villain to have said anything oblique about the character of this little bird. It and its home were a positive monu-

ment to the art and the snowy morality of Switzerland.

And as if God, who had permitted Jacquot-Jacquette in the world, felt sorry at having allowed something still more pitiable, at its heartbreaking peep of midnight to the empty room, three or four figures came in.

There were Madame de l'Etoile, her maid, and her musical director. The optional fourth, if Elise and Jacquot-Jacquette were truly a separable group, was the shivering Belgian dragon. And indeed, a confused or inaccurate mind might have imagined another creature from the book of Natural History into this trinity so oddly framed together by their prodigal wraps against the cold, for the musical director was encased by a fur coat so large, so thick and ostensible, so reckless of surroundings and so long of hair, that with nothing of his humanity but his big brown eyes shining out of it as they did, he looked like a polar bear.

This was the third dislocated matter of the evening, the Italian in the United States; and the vast rugged and ruglike shag that would have made him splendid at the Opera as both Fasolt and Fafner in *The Rheingold* was one of his agencies against disaster in so hazardous a part of the geography.

Happily, most happily uprooted and potted for a hot-house winter he, but not by any virtues of North America—only by virtue of Madame de l'Etoile and her triumphs, the deep-breathing satisfaction of proximity to her. For this child of Naples, who had wriggled up out of the Italian soil with a bland wide-eyed gaze and an earring-to-earring smile for the whole visible world and especially for the Mediterranean, who had sailed that ocean uncounted times, from stem to stern, from Genoa to Gibraltar and Cadiz to Barcelona, who had never been sea-sick and who knew a boat from leeward to steward, and who usually had embarked on a vessel that looked as if it would teeter-tawter at the thought of a bath-tub, had firmly (as indeed many precocious persons do) stopped short at the Atlantic.

There was a difference between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, and no one could deny it. Least of all could Madame de l'Etoile, with her love of truth, an element of her nature best-known to this man of all those whom she loved or who loved her; and withal, her inability, in this large case of a notorious ocean to deal with, to make him see her fine point of distinction between facts and truths, between statistics and principles. There were dragons in that sea, though he did not tell her so. There they were, *there*, for this great and brave man anyhow, who had already faced Elise's monster on land without one squirm or quaver; while, first and last, no oceanic, submarine Jacquot-Jacquette of cathedral size and seaweed on its tail compared in fabricated awfulness with that sea itself. That love had forced his foot on board the frail leviathan devised by man in his shallow egoism to carry them to safety through such perils had meant a soul that was an angel's soul with fists of martyrs' steel. But to the United States Madame de l'Etoile would go, and to the United States had gone her Maestro, following his Star. Columbus was an Italian, too.

He had emerged from his prairie-dog hole of fur, letting it mound up on the floor behind him, and crystalizing to the comparative décolleté of an evening-suit, a thin sparkling-eyed figure of light-like lines and a blaze of diamonds; and she, semi without and semi with Elise's one-handed help had slipped from her swathings too, and in a soft rare frock was perched rather exhaustedly, not quite daring to relax, on the edge of the couch. And though something other than their many bandages that had warmed them through their wordless drive home—an electric-like current of rich telepathic happiness—was coursing between these two and await for speech, her first words were to the maid.

"Elise, will you see if Daisy is yet home?"

"She is asleep, Madame," said Elise.

As they had but this moment entered, Wanda's sur-

prise at the promptitude of this answer betrayed itself.

"Are you sure, Elise? She was at the performance. How do you know?"

"I would not say so if I were not sure, Madame. She went to sleep during the Communion Scene. I saw her, as we were watching in the wings. And now she is asleep here. I heard her, as we came in."

Wanda was momentarily silenced—not by Elise's ubiquitous logic, which she knew by heart, but to the romantic mind of Madame de l'Etoile the idea of a loudly sleeping princess was news, somehow. A "little tipsy flower" had been a voluntary simile of her own. But a snoring forget-me-not . . . ! And in search for a tactful rejoinder she came upon a neglected thought that seemed to her a most fortunate one.

"Oh, Elise, I found such a pretty book for you on a stall this morning! It is in English, but of words so simple that even I could read the whole first page. So if you are not sleepy, you may amuse yourself with it now. I am sure it is pretty. I chose it by the title—'A Modest Passion.'"

"Thank you, Madame, but I have read it," said Elise.

"Oh, I am sorry!" said Wanda, disconcerted. "I did not suppose you had read anything in English."

"I had not, Madame. But I was certain you must have intended it for me. I knew that Parsifal was very long. So while you were singing the temptation scene, I read 'A Modest Passion' through, Madame."

"If," said Wanda thoughtfully, "if Madame la Princesse is—is as sound asleep as you say, you might tip-toe in and get Jacquot-Jacquette to finish!"

"Thank you, Madame," said Elise, and thus dismissed with a bonus—and a prized one, for it led her to believe Madame had forgotten the erstwhile and betrayed nefarious finishing of that fateful volume—she departed; but first practising a formality. Aside from the living prize Jacquot-Jacquette she had not been empty-handed of

priceless treasure, and with graceful precision she proffered Madame de l'Etoile her jewel-box.

Then she and the poor shivering *bête-noire* of her were gone; and in this their first moment of coveted solitude together, even along with Madame's slight gesture of the jewel-box to the couch beside her, her companion was electrically a step toward her, his long arm and its Rubaiyat forefinger pump-handling the air pointer-wise at her, and his autumn-pool eyes shining rich competition with the glitter of diamonds on the sawing hand; and as if the latest tongue of her fond adoption must be momentarily his child too to sufficiently pleasure her, he spoke in English.

"I did not wanted you to sang it! Fiercely with fervour cried me against you! And to-night you again teach me moreover forover our music-lesson: *I can trust you! Shoo-oo-oo-er!*"

And thus for once strangely using his favourite and formerly one English word where it belonged, he smiled—a smile that vanished into a different, a deeper facial exudition of happiness at the responding words that swept from her seated figure all its vestige of lassitude and lifted her hands exquisitely toward him.

"Yes, darling, yes—after all your patience, all your devotion, all your care for me through the Gran Via—*yes!*"

And then, as if all vital value of it for them had been consumed by his little explosion of almost resentful happiness in her triumph and her own usage for him of the exquisite English word of caress, they dropped their foreign language, and their little at-home sacred-musical-festival-play topping the vast one at the Opera to-night was in a tongue ineffable, Spanish, Italian, a Latin unwritable, yet as if composed for them by some neo-classic, neo-modern opera-author who had mixed the traditions, which were her voice, with ultra innovations, which were his. His air-sawing, diamonded hand had fallen glittering into his pocket, mechanically, with the mechanism of

human animal instinct, and fetched out a mussed array of Manila cigarettes, and the air and colours of the pretty room were clouded with Bohemian billows of smoke even as with Peninsula rapidity of deed upon thought she had risen and with her exhaustion gone as if it had not been, swept across to the piano; and a loud Neapolitan protest followed her.

"Yet indeed never *can* you be trusted! You shall not sing when I have smoked! It was a long opera and you must not sing! It was a long opera and I must smoke! And I must not smoke if you sing!"

With her reply her eyes were starry with a moment's far-off pensiveness of starlight, her voice was soft as starlight, near to forget-me-not, despite their so different colour, with memory, nearer still to that blossom with tenderness for him.

"The whole audience smoked in the Tivoli in Barcelona! . . . Before that, before you knew me, in the Alcázar even the *women* in the audience smoked! And if you do not smoke, I will not sing!"

At that mention of the Alcázar, reminiscence poignant for him to whom it did not belong than even to her to whom it did, a little choke stopped his new remonstrance. She had fetched the jewel-box to the piano with her; all the wealth of it, that she had elected to wear as Kundry, lay in the rosy lamplight shimmering, frostily shivering, animatedly, livingly as Jacquot-Jacquette; and with one hand she lifted out one loved trinket of old pearls and a ruby as with the other she strayed over the keyboard drawing from it notes, delicate as the jewels, from the "Air des Bijoux" of *Faust*.

"Paris! Paris gave me this! It has in it a bit of du Barry's heart that was cut out of her body after she was guillotined, and kept through the generations and set *for me* inside a jewel that she wore—an ear-ring—*this* ring. And as I was no longer anything like her, I could wear it for them—for the people—for Paris; and I did. And do. Paris. . . ."

She broke off, and her voice strayed into the song—softly, bits of it; fulsomely, all of it. Facets. . . .

"It was after I had sung them *that*, that Paris sent it to me. Do you remember?"

And very softly, his eyes toward the floor, his chin in his hand, he answered:

"I remember!"

"And these!" Her hand lifted another loveliness from the rich chest. "They *threw* me these, in Petersburg, right in the theatre—yes, *as I sang*—*as*—*as I sang*! They gave, nor would they take back again, afterward, despite I thought they ought, on account of Russian emotion—emotion at *this*."

And the voice that was lovelier than the jewels swept joyously into *La Traviata*, the "Ah, fors e lui" which was so great, and so right, a part of her fame.

"Do you remember?"

And again it was very softly that he answered: "I remember!"

"And this!"

And at the first note he started and an ejaculation came from him: "Rome!" for the wonderful voice, suddenly profound with colour, had vibrated the room with the opening organ-tone of "O Patria mia!" And presently, without written music but with a wonderful music of its own, the voice was again addressing *him*: "They gave me, that night, only noise, but such a loving, understanding noise! Dio! And just as I was feeling a little lonely there, because no fond foolish jewelry was given me, and this being an Egyptian opera, and I no longer having the pretty Egyptian beads I loved, and being God knew how far from the friend who did have them, the friend I loved so much more, just at that lonely moment, Rome gave me *this*!"

And she held aloft from the treasure-box a resplendent, glittering thing—her wonderful bandeau of brilliants—radiant, like Rome; stately—like Rome.

"Your crown!" he cried, declaring it. "Yes, your

crown, for that was greatest of all—yes, yes, to *me*, the greatest of your great nights!”

“Except,” she said softly, “perhaps, my ‘Traviata’ here, which I admit, if only for your sake, was an afternoon; and except, perhaps—*perhaps—to-night!* But ah, my dear—” for she saw in his brown-gold eye-pools a ripple of storm for the forbidden music she had to-night indulged in, “do you remember—*this?*”

And her fingers rippled into the gaiety, her voice into the lyrical sweetness, of the “Cigarette Song” from *Gran Via*.

It was a strange capping of Gounod and of Verdi, but cap it was, with bells, and colours, and a triumphant feather, for she sang it now as she had not sung it in the Spanish Tivoli, as she had not, and even with life hanging with its whole weight to her tones could not have sung it, in the Hôtel de Francia of the little Plaza de Loreto. And upon the last harping tinkle of it his answering voice was passionate.

“I remember *that?* It was after you had looked at those notes, and said ‘*That is pretty,*’ and I had said ‘*I can trust you,*’ and I was standing in the little Plaza and I whistled that for you, because I saw those English coming, and you had said to me you were running away from them for me—it was then *that I knew you were the darling of my brain*, and that I would always fear for you; that——”

His voice choked, and she finished for him:

“That our noses would always go the same way! But—darling, darling, you say ‘fear’ for me, and with—with tears—to-night?”

“Remember,” he said huskily, “I am your father and your mother, two hundred years old apiece, and for every one of those old four hundred years, *proud* of you!”

“Oh!” she breathed, and there was in her own voice a sudden little sob. “What words!”

“And ‘fear?’” his words swept on. “Fear is the lot of parents! And you ask ‘To-night?’ Yes, to-night

more than some other times, for though my torment in that great big red barn is over, I had it to experience, as I had the Atlantic! And there will be more of your whimsies! I will live torments again! There is your monstrous habit of new rôles for new places, and we have not sung yet in Zulu-Land! I have even London yet to undergo. You will not sign your beautiful contract for London. You know how they thirst for your Traviata there, and you *will* not sign it. And I know why—for I know you, you, you. At last you will sign it. And then—whimsie! Yes, I know you! I can believe, in my worst moments of despair, that when at last you should go to London, you would make your first appearance there in 'Isolde'!"

"Why," she exclaimed, gazing at him with brows raised, and eyes wide in either a child's naïveté or a serpent's subtlety, "why, that is exactly what I plan to do!"

He had been pacing, diamonded-hands mobile as a wind-mill, and this sank him, groaning and the hands clasped like a Magdalene's on top of his head, the fire of the diamonds smothered in black brilliantined hair.

Merciless in her stirred thoughts she had turned back to the keyboard, and softly, exquisitely, chorded suggestions of the *Liebestod* seeped from it; but whatever her intention, her voice did not touch it, as if it were too sacred a thing even for her home, and for him, as yet; and as if something of this sped to him through their telepathic line of understanding, he looked up, his storm blown over, his face exquisite with tenderness as some amateur Christ's above the calmed waves of it.

"I know what you want. Here have I let you sing and myself smoke. Here have you sung a whole afternoon and night the whole German Baedeker, and you sit up till morning singing to please me in a side-street music-hall of tobacco, when what you want is to write your *own* Baedeker! Yes, I know—your own red-covered book! And your only word of longing was in those piano tones there! I know your thoughts! I will prove

it. I knew a thought of yours five minutes ago, when after singing for me of Paris, and Petersburg, and Rome, to make me happy, you said *to-night* was your perhaps great night. Do you remember your own thought then? You were thinking—for I know you!—"These United States have given me no jewels to hold up to his proud eyes. These unemotional United States, I must love for the jewels of appreciation they give!" That was your thought, and I knew it! And you want now, you have wanted every minute, your little books that I smoke you away from!"

There were tears in her eyes as she sat gazing at him, but she brushed them away with joyous words.

"Darling, a lie to you would be a useless lie, and I have thought of my little books, and sometimes here in these United States I have thought as you say about my pretty jewelry. But my thought of five minutes ago, though you divined it in a way, was directly opposite to the way you read it. For I *have* had a present here, in these Estados Unidos, and so strange, so strangely beautiful a present, coming out of that same nameless heartbeat as Rome's, or Petersburg's, or my heart's Place de l'Opéra's. And you must see it—indeed, is it not partly yours? It is in there—yes, to-night we will be outrageous, and you shall come into my bedroom! Indeed, as truthful persons in our glory, did we not sleep in one bed, all five of us, one night? Do you remember *that*? It was on the way to Geneva—where I enjoyed the Opera so, for it made the same noise the bull-fight does at home! Come!" And she took him with one hand, the jewel-box with the other. "This, as you will see, goes into my beautiful United States present, instead of my United States present into *it*!"

And here, on a table set for it beside her bed, was the extraordinary present—a thing black-leather covered, that thus, with its eyes closed, seemed to his wide-open staring ones a plain oblong box, and looked like a travelling salesman's sheathed battle-axe; but that, upon her

unlocking it with an incredibly small key, and his uncontrollable fingers winning over hers to the toy task of opening it, unfolded itself into a beautiful piece of furniture of intricate workmanship, a miniature desk, of leather, and wood, and delicate metal fixtures, of diminutive drawers and shelves and compartments, Orient-suggesting in its involution and minute success of plan, and its several parts building up like a stairway narrowing in perspective. Thus had she been loved by some quaint ingrowing mind that could spend and had spent itself and its hands upon such a device for her possible pleasure—manifestation, quite literally manifestation, of a love esoteric and as deeply innocent as esoteric.

Together, and to an accompaniment of his guttural squeals of delight, they constructed it, and as it mounted under their careful hands to the likeness of the side of a pyramid:

"One more reason why I love this gift!" she whispered. "And see—also little shelves, and little leather books! They are literature-books, not music. Yet, nothing else but books that have become operas! A little Pelléas, a little Roméo, a little Carmen! And—room for more!"

"I know which more!" he cried, and opening the lowest part, he disclosed triumphantly her case of red-bound treasures, which had fitted to a tune of precision in a half of the lowermost space of it.

She made no denial. Only she said gently:

"My jewel-case, in *there!*"

"It is *this* jewel-case you want," he said, "and you shall have it. I am glad you have your little jewel-Baedeker-library in here—in this, and in this room. Away from nuisances. I know you. Having found your mistake, you would not have moved your writing without this chance reason. But I am glad your singing with ink is removed from that Throne Room—from that Royalty, that Crowned Head, that Empress of Russia, that Queen of Scorpions! You should be in bed; and

I would make you, I would chastise you to there, but that I know that this will rest you more. And it will not be driving me, your parents, away. I will sit in there, and smoke my cigarettes until they are gone. And if you have finished before they are, come back in there and we will say good night. And if the cigarettes are finished first, the good night does not matter. We will not say it. I will not interrupt you."

Wordlessly, she looked at him, touched his cheek with her fingers; and wordlessly, he left her bedroom and closed the door.

Motionless, she gazed at that gently closed door for a moment, her face a mask of wonder at the wonder of human feeling; then she seated herself and lifted out the newest of the little red books.

To-night, my own, be glad, be glad with me! I have sung Kundry! Once more, how happy I am! For it was another triumph, and for here, my greatest. For I know the verdict, and can tell you before to-morrow's papers—because in this case, you see, some of the great critics—ah, so kindly!—have been to my dressing-room; and the public mind, that mind of *my people*, I can sometimes read without help of periódico print. And my own, from things beforehand, and from things now, the chief excitement seems to be, because *I* should sing it so. Why not? Well, on account of my other great rôles, it seems. People think them a strange assortment—Mimi, Traviata, Carmen, Juliette, and now, Kundry. (And Tosca. If I had sung her. I think of her among them, for she is in me, living though await. For some reason, as if from some reason making me wait without telling me why, I have never allowed her yet; and ah, *there* is a part! *That last cry . . . when hope is over, and knowing that, she leaps! . . .* Dio! . . .) Well, this diversity on my part is unusual, perhaps, but why so very wonderful? I think myself it is because Americans, accustomed to do anything and everything, and never thinking to pause at anything *or* every-

thing, consider us foreigners as able to do only one thing supremely well each, according to nation. Yet has not something similar been greatly done? —Nordica again! *She* sings Traviata, *she* sings Kundry! And *she* sings *Isolde!* . . . Dio! Dio! . . . And if she has not sung Carmen, has not Calvé sung that *and Marguerite!* Well, so have I! And again I say, Why Not? Alas, they allow my Carmen great, but generations after she is dead, Carmen will still be Calvé—and rightly so—unless her ghost gets into a factory-fight with Minnie Hauk's. I am inclined to think Calvé's will win anyway, for thank God I have heard her. I am still too young to have heard Minnie Hauk. (What is the matter with that English? Something!) But they place my Carmen *next*, anyway. They say I put the very streets of Sevilla in her, and perhaps I do. . . . I know those streets of Sevilla! It was there that first. . . . But I have said that my soul is new. . . .

One thing they grant me with "the whole heart": that no one ever has sung, that no one ever will sing, the little song "The Daughters of Cadiz" as I do. That makes me happy, and I sing it at every excuse—I always put it into "The Barber of Sevilla," where Rossini's song was lost. And how annoyed it makes the audiences, my own, that I do not instead sing a Strauss waltz—until they have *heard* me sing "Les Filles de Cadiz"! . . .

Of the Kundry, my own, there is one thing said about me to-night that arouses my heart's interest. It is that as Kundry there is about me, and even in my voice, a something barbaric, a something Moorish, as if I had brought it with me from my country—from there in the North, where is said to have been the Holy Grail at Montserrat, there in the cleft of the Holy Mountain, our Sagrada Montaña. *And I have never been there!* How sorry and ashamed that makes me feel! And I have but lately, in my thoughts and studies of Parsifal and Kundry, found that I must have walked almost under the very shadow of it in my terrible Gran Via, before I came to the blessed little town in the foot-hills of which I have

told you. How high, how wonderful it must be, standing like a magical rampart there with its great grotesques on its top thousands of feet above the River Llobregat! Do you know, my own, that when I think very much about it, likening it in my mind to some sorcerer-fabrication of Klingsor's, I have a strange prophetic feeling about the Sagrada Montaña? I have a feeling that besides all my desire and my intention to go sometime to it, I *am* to go. There is about it in my imagination something so high, so wonderfully high, so *toward God*, that it seems to call to my ambition, my aspiration. . . . Am I morose again—as I was about that terrible money till God stopped me—when I feel that perhaps it would be to sing my “swan song”? . . .

But I am happy . . . and let me tell you something! To-day, as if a tribute to my Kundry in American faith and generosity even before I sang it, someone, someone just from among *people*, has sent me a beautiful present. Oh—But I must tell you about that later, for another love, a love known to me, my Maestro's, waits in the next room patiently, patiently while I talk to you. And I must go back to him for “good nights” in our Spanish, yours and mine, and in a polyglot, mine and his, when I have told you just one more thing about *Traviata*. To-night I can, for my Kundry, and my Maestro, and my beautiful present, all drive me to, but till now I was too angry, and then too downcast at myself. For my own, I am deeply filled with remorse over something. I have boasted to you that I try to be kind to women, try always to love them. Even Elise. And my own, I *do* try to love Elise, and even her gargoyle. But my own, there *have* to be some people in the world one does not love. It is wrong, of course, absolutely, but it is a *fact*. And with Elise, perhaps there is some excuse for me—a sad excuse!—that I was not born to having lady's-maids. For it would seem to be the awful truth that in this combination, the lady is Elise—being from France, where every woman is so alarmingly aristocratic, whether in a *blanchisserie* or not. If

Elise went into society, she would wear one ear-ring and an orang-outang, and be applauded for it. If I did that, I would not be. Being of the people, I have to earn applause by hard work—as I did to-night. However, I am not downhearted. If I could learn to sing Kundry, perhaps I can yet learn to love Elise. Anyway, you know how I *do* love “La Traviata.” The Wayward One! (How pretty in English!) Well, there is a beautiful prima donna here, who is lovely to me when I have first came here. Of the whole opera house, the most lovely and welcoming. She *is* beautiful. Even now I admit it. Even her nose is beautiful. But she sings through it. Well, she had never sung Traviata through it. You know how there were delays and delays of *my* singing it, once I had changed my mind about it for my American début. Rather, you do not know *how*, and now I *do*. My own, can you believe such a thing? It is because she was a politician! An unsuccessful one, but *imagine* such a thing! *My lovely Traviata!* Anyway, I sang it. Afterward, so has she. But still less will you believe what a terrible thing I have done. For, my own, I have committed a low and unworthy action. One of the sensations here of my beautiful Traviata is the very end of Act One. It has been very famously done before. Just what I do—well, I do not steam-whistle it, and I do not tremolo it, or sew buttons on it, or wave a flag with it. Perhaps I can best tell it you that in that instant I prove that I am not only a great coloratura, but a great *lyric* singer. It is something that even the most beautiful nose could not possibly do. It needs a throat, and several things beside—as was found out later. For meantime I had found out, and I was there, from both good manners and evil curiosity. And as she is a great actress—I admit *that*—at that trying point she takes those lovely notes and turns them into a sensational scream of laughter. And it was then, at that great moment of her melodrama triumph with her following, that I seized my terrible revenge, for I was all prepared. I had tried to calm my indignation, but my

mind had festered. And in that intermission, by a subtle means that she could not discover me—well, I might as well confess to you the means—by an anonymous messenger boy, I have given her a box of bird-seed!

My own, can you ever respect me again? But my conscience has tortured me, for my own, for several days she was very ill, so ill I have wondered if she had not taken it for what it was worth, and eaten it! Nor can I be quite certain of my life either, for I have met her at a party since, and could not be quite assured from her kisses whether they were because she had unmasked me, or to cover up her own crimes against *me*. I was almost afraid to open that beautiful package that came to-day! But my own, my own, though it has eased me to confess to you, God forgive me for something else—I had forgotten my Maestro! . . .

She went swiftly to the door and opened it, and a little sound of hurt conscience came from her; for she was greeted only by blackness and a drift of dying cigarette-smoke. Softly as if the drifting odour were a loved presence, she closed the door again, with a long sigh at the sense of replete solitude the action gave her.

My own, how very selfish I can be, even to my nearest, dearest! He had gone, not even for a "good night" willing to take me from you! But I can be glad of it and of my aloneness without *too* great selfishness, because that lack of a *Dios* seems to-night to mean, somehow, that still is his gentle presence here with me, helping me like to-day's beautiful present to write on to you freely in that aloneness with you that I craved.

My own, hotly, frightenedly my little red book talked to you one night, red, ruddy-blood-coloured like its cover, black, black-of-night like its ink—talked of the strange geography of the Great Way, of the Epiphany, with its light, the Wilderness, with its voice, with its voice of pages cried desperately out to you asking if this could

be its Valle Malo. Surely, surely, my own, it cannot be, and what I cry out to you to-night is, what, then, *can* it be? Because to-night itself, this night of Kundry and the Grail, when we would suppose the Sagrada Montaña and that Bad Valley torn in its breast would the more paint my thoughts, has instead, somehow, told me otherwise. Into that Kundry of mine went all those thoughts, and there they lie, in her strange exquisite costume, so to speak, for the present. Thus much is my brain a nicely adjusting one. But my own, what is this part of La Gran Via? It is a beautiful part in many ways. My life is very blessed with much love—even from Daisy, indeed; even from Elise, I actually think, if someone tried to murder me, for instance—she would at least show her gargoyle at my assailant. And it is a life very full of pretty colours—colours of art, and of elegance, and beautiful harnesses to wear when I would trot about to parties. And best of all, far best, it has a *calm*, yes, quite constantly, except, of course, in the opera house where it is quite right I should be a Vesuvius, and except in my little book, where, right or wrong, I *have* to be one; a calm that I had touched, and been storing bit by bit within, but that came greatly with the going from me at last, through God's touching me, in turn, upon the shoulder, of that terrible Trudge Market money. Yet there is something wrong, my own, with this stretch of the great road; either something wrong, or something lacking, or else, just something that I have not the vision to understand. As long ago, and as I afterward supposed never would be again, my mind *seeks*—seeks a word, a name. That, if I could find it, for you know how words have been always touchstones for me, my own, *that* would vanish the clouds. Not that the Great Way is clouded. That miraculous universal thing is clear. Even this part of it, for have I not told you it is colourful? Why, it is *brilliant*! The clouds are in *me*!

And shall I tell you what I need? For I know—every fibre in me tells me what I need at this moment of the

Way. My own, I need Isabel, my Isabel from whom I ran away, and *rightly*, doing it as I did in faith, utter faith, that *we* would be again, *be* again, "she and I," when it was right, when it should be God's choosing, not just hers, or mine. Have I lost that faith? Or am I just a person who is a little bit tired in church, and not a heretic? I do not know! I know only that she is what I need, need—my Isabel, my Sacrament. *She* would strengthen me, guide me. *She* would know, as she saw and knew that sacramental day. For there *is* a definite need of guidance, my own. There *is* a definite thing that I know about and struggle with, and that I have not told you. Perhaps, needing, and lacking, my Isabel, some guidance will come, some *substitute* guidance, from without or from within. If from within, the first step toward it, my own, is to urge it outward by confession to *you*, to see it in words staring up into my face. To-night, I can. I shrink to do it, and I must. I dare not, and I will. Yes, presently I will dare.

But first, I have not told you quite the full truth about the bird-seed. To do so will help, will force my pen in. I said I have given it by a messenger boy. I did not lie, I *quibbled*. I even quibbled it into a literal fact, by leaving out the hyphen from "messenger-boy." A messenger, yes. A boy? Yes, to me, though older than I am. A man, my own, and, such were my purpose and subtlety, a beautiful young American caballero, so that if his appearance is reported to her, it is an elegant, aristocratic young gentleman of the kind she would have adored to subdue, of that splendid kind of American good-looks so fascinating to women. (As if any kind of good-looks, except female ones, were not!) And moreover, my own, a gentleman who is all generosity and chivalrousness, who would be horrified to do such a thing and would quite likely have refused to!

Dear, I have written in my strange little book often and often of Arno, of my good man friend, all kindness, all gentleness, all unselfishness; and from these references

you must be aware—how I pathetically still write as if you—as if you had read!—that he, like Daisy, and like my Maestro, is a part of my life, a familiar part.

Yes, that bird-seed has driven me; the pen is face to face with the matter.

My own, I have not kept the deeper part of that part from my little book to keep it from you, but to keep it from myself. I have feared to look too near at what he offered me. I have feared myself and feared for my fidelity to you, in presence of the beauty, the peace and the rest, which he has held out for me in his generous, understanding hand.

To tell you of beautiful presents being held out to me, dear, is easy! But of my own mind having had one instant's pause as to *this* gift? Of that mind's confusion?

Can I tell it you? Yes, to-night I can, with before me this loving present from which I now write to you, dear tribute from a heart, meaning *the* heart, of that my great wonderful Friend "just people," holding for me only the joy-task of simple taking, so different from the problem-tribute of *a* dear, dear friend; and with *around* me, somehow, either from Isabel, or—God allow me the thought—from—from you, a feeling of love that is near me, close to me, like some warm shadow, that seems to-night to protect me, to somehow comfort me, like a guardian angel, yes, like the warm shadow of a guardian angel's wings.

Thus I can. And must, for only so, as yet, can there perhaps reach my seeking mind a little light. . . .

And a little light had reached, if not the seeking mind, at least through the windows of the outer room, before she lay breathing easily, peacefully, in this one. Through the rich curtains and across the floor it crept stealthily till it dispelled one shadow that had lain, like a guardian angel though recumbent and asleep, across her closed doorway. With the light's golden-fingered reaching of it it rose, and shook itself instinctively and thoroughly

as if it had circled around several times before lying down there; looked at the closed door listening cautiously, deeply, tiptoed to the room's other door, and vanished through it, to appear in the lobby and to the astonishment of the desk-clerk—pausing before that sleepy functionary with a huge shrug, graphically raised eyebrows, and an outflung gesture of empty hands.

“Cigarette?”

The speechless clerk handed him one and the dishevelled shadow, deeply inhaling this first instalment of breakfast, sauntered into Fifth Avenue, and happily down that splendid great silent way, whistling the Cigarette Song from *La Gran Via*.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE MIRACLE OF ROSES

IT was still sharp, bright winter in New York, it was a kind of crisp money-gold that came through Wand's creamy-fabricked curtains in the afternoon, lighting and Arnold—such of it as remained over, first here, there yonder, from the blotting figure of Elise, who now at the window, then at the other, and afterward, but never finally, at this one again, was absorbedly busy.

For there was one duty imposed by her song-bird mistress that Elise positively enjoyed, and that was the daily one of feeding the birds, resident or transient, whatever geography themselves, birds of passage too, but temporarily alighted in—the birds who could not sing, and who as likely could not easily get enough to eat. Common with so remarkably many women who have a discernible love for humanity, Elise liked animals, and especially, as exemplified in the rich hideous Jacques Jacquette, any that were either grotesque or very dainty—and well exemplified, for the wretched Belgian was not compound in name only, but in these concrete qualities too. And particularly, Elise liked these cold little English sparrows in New York, who shivered so very like Jacques Jacquette. Therefore this duty dear to Madame de l'Etoile's heart in Madame's list of instructions, a little loose in general and tight in particularities, Elise fulfilled and overfulfilled. She would joyously—as she had done just now—hurl wide the windows at any senseless hour to crumb the sills, no matter what the weather, quite cheerfully giving Madame pneumonia if that chanced as an incidental; just as she would—and did—as cheerfully and senselessly make exquisite toast for them which they like

no better than bread, and would really have preferred not to wait about for, though she hated as the devil hates a crucifix to make even burned toast for the princess. Indeed, Elise liked birds. She could with delight have cut Daisy's throat when Wanda gave her that idiotic clock, and likely would have done, had it happened in France where murderesses are applauded; and had Wanda but known timely of this state of mind, doubtless Elise would long before that have got it.

Yet Wanda and Arnold were alone, indeed the more so from this absorbed presence of Elise as evidenced by the gale intermittently gusting on them, for the very fact of it somehow precipitated the courage he lacked when completely solitary with her. And Wanda felt this and was strangely nervous.

She knew his patience. She knew his willingness to meet her every wish, her every mood. Yet as weeks had passed with no expressed hint from him of the suspense that trembled through his bearing, lit his eyes, and crept into his voice, she had begun guiltily to fear some urge, some question, and it did come to-day.

"No," she said, shaking her head with lips pressed together and eyes that avoided his. "No, Arno. I cannot talk again of it now. Did you expect me to?"

"No—dear." And after a silence he added: "I'm ashamed of myself, Wanda. I should be thankful that you promised even to think of it. And I *am* thankful. Believe that, Wanda."

"Arno," she said slowly, "it is but fair to tell you this. That I *have* thought. And that I am as I was in my mind. I cannot see wrong from right. I see and see *more* wrong, and *more* right, till I am worse and worse troubled and confused, instead of either the one or the other 'more' helping me. Soon, at my New York season's end, I will be going away to Paris. This dear, appreciating Nueva York asks me to stay longer than my contract, and my dear—is it now any dearer?—Paris is lenient with me. But I long somehow for my springtime

in Paris, according my plan as looked forward to. And to be gone away from you—that will help, perhaps—help me in my mind.”

“Wanda, I too will be in Paris.”

“You insist upon going where I go? That is not right or kind—is not *you!*”

“I do not insist on going where you go. My sister has asked me to go over—to meet her fiancé.”

“Ah! Forgive me!”

“And perhaps—perhaps—she will meet mine, Wanda?”

“Perhaps, Arno. Yes, I will say perhaps.” She looked at him strangely, a poignant glitter growing, as if against much, then more, of her will-power, in her eyes. “It is wicked for me to say even so slight a word as that ‘perhaps,’ because it is so utterly unlikely——!”

“Not as wicked as ‘utterly no’!” he flashed uncontrollably, uncharacteristically.

“So *utterly unlikely*, Arno! For the more I think, the more I know the truth of that great reason I told you of—that I—must it be in trying words again, for both sakes?—that I—I *do* not love you that way. And with you forgiving me that, how selfish would I be, taking all the good and giving none, and almost surely giving harm! Arno——”

The distant sound of the telephone cut her short.

“Elise, the telephone! Elise!”

Arnold had to call this name “Elise,” and then both of them together, before the same Elise reluctantly closed the windows of charity on the long bread-lines of British poor standing outside; and even then, as if to put her distemper tangibly on record, she paused to snap down the shades, thus plunging the room in a most disagreeable twilight before speeding to the noisome instrument.

“Let me finish, Arno. Friend, I said ‘giving harm,’ and you know my meaning. That past would rise up at the most cruel moment, horrible and satirical—somehow. Would it not? Is not that life? Is not that life, *when one has offended life?* Would I not be offending it again,

if I—if I—met your wish? Arno, you look at all the color-de-rosa of life! Would there be any colour of roses, Arno, when up across the rosy sun steps some figure that knew me as I—when I——”

Elise reappeared.

“Madame, a Mrs. Rugg wishes to see you.”

“Mrs.—*who?*”

“Mrs. Rugg.”

“Tell them spell it!”

“I did, Madame, and it was Mrs. Rugg.
R—u—g—g.”

“Tell—tell them send her up at once!”

Her paleness startled him as he saw her gazing after Elise’s retreating figure.

“This is someone you used to know, Wanda?”

“Yes, Arno, this shows exactly what I was just now speaking to you!”

“Then why see her, dear?”

“Because I love her! Arno, listen to me quickly! Do not go out. Stay and meet this lady. But I do not know like what the meeting will be. So, ask me if you shall bring me some flowers. Then if I say roses, I will mean all is happy, so go and do not come back to-day. But if I shall say violets—violets for an unhappiness? But—I cannot think enough quickly—so, yes, there is another way for thinking of the violets, and if I say violets, go for a few minutes only. . . . Only long enough to bring them. . . . Why do I do this, Arno? Do you wonder? Is it a silly melodrama trick, of which I have lately accused a beautiful woman in my own hard, hard profession? You can see, now, that we never *can* face the past, we women, never! Not even the kind and beautiful part of it! Will you do this silly thing for me? Will you do what I asked?”

“Yes, dear, yes!”

“You see, I can quickly devise nothing more sensible. And if there *is* not that color-de-rosas that I so fatally spoke, then, oh, then, it will not be the other for just an

opposite sign, but it will truly be violets that I will need, yes, *need*, violets for another memory of mine!"

"Yes, yes, dear!" he said again; and again Elise came through the doorway.

"Mrs. Rugg, Madame."

It was Doña Rina; but Doña Rina with such a curious, unfathomable difference that the brief space of greeting and of presenting Arnold to her old friend left Wanda puzzled, with chilled impulses, and deeply, inexpressibly hurt. Though she had met her with eager, almost trembling hand, there had not been so much as a gleam of warmth in the American's eyes. This, Wanda assured herself, was sheer consideration for her; it would have been characteristic of Doña Rina, she argued, to be thus for the opening moment even had they met alone, to give her time and chance for any rôle she might wish to assume. Yet even with a stranger there, the eye could telegraph, the hand could be warm—any one of a dozen little subtleties could be, between such close-brought friends as these had been; and even in spite of her own mad panic of a few moments ago she had found herself, as her former patroness entered, armed with all tools to penetrate any formality, chisel swiftly away any awkwardness. And she realized that she not only had not been met half-way, but had not been come toward by a single step.

And one more thing, material purely, photographed itself instantly and painfully on her sensibility—Doña Rina's clothes. Not that she had fallen back into her old undiscerning manner of wearing them. Quite otherwise, all that her strange maid in Paris had taught her remained unforgotten, was indelibly there. It was the clothes themselves. Wanda could feel her own soft silk fur-edged house-gown literally biting at her guest's inexpensive "suit"—a "suit" worn with a good, brave air, but not so much as tailored—a suit out of a shop. It disturbed her, worried her, and the more so because she had received the graphic registration intuitively almost rather than visually—and so poignantly that ungracious,

almost unwelcoming as she knew the dull twilight of the room to be, she also knew that she was actually comforting the guest by not switching the lights on.

"I have called, Madame de l'Etoile," Mrs. Rugg had explained briefly, "to ask if, either now or at some more convenient time, you would give me an interview."

"With—with much pleasure!" stammered Wanda, utterly at a loss.

"This afternoon, I fear I'm interrupting you. If you would make an appointment——"

"I fear I'm the one that interrupts this afternoon," put in Arnold, and Wanda's heart gave a doubting throb between thankfulness and regret for her device and her remembering cavalier. "When you came, Mrs. Rugg, I was about to go out for Madame de l'Etoile. I must attend to your flowers now, Wanda, if they're to be in time for you."

"Oh, yes, Arno! Thank you! They must be violets, remember—nothing but violets!"

"I shall find them. And you too, I hope, Mrs. Rugg, when I return."

Wanda hoped for light when he should be gone, but none came. The expression in the tired-looking woman's eyes did not change. Whatever the barrier between them, Wanda felt it to be as adamant as what she had intuitively divined to be her old companion's new quality, new externally if not new in soul—a hard, nearing to bitter, pride.

"Suppose, Mrs. Rugg, we make the interview another day, and this afternoon just 'chat,' and have tea? That will be pleasant, yes?"

"Very, Madame. And thank you."

"It is here to hand, indeed, the *right-hand*, you see! And what kind of interview, Mrs. Rugg? I do not quite understand. You see, my English is not perfect, clever as I *used* to think myself!"

It was as near as she dared come, and it brought no response.

"The conventional interview, Madame. Your methods.

Your little likes and dislikes—anything you are willing to tell of your personal life. What are your favourite rôles, what your ambitions. The same old questions.”

“Ah, I see a little!” And a very little light had broken upon Wanda. “An interview for a periódico—or some similar purpose?”

“Of course, Madame!” It was Mrs. Rugg’s turn for surprise. “I am reporter for the woman’s page of the *Star*. I supposed your maid had explained, for I naturally explained fully to her, on the telephone!”

“I begin to understand much!” exclaimed Wanda. “And *all* of the maid part, I understand and am sure that you can!” Again she drew daringly close through the temptation of the chance past subject, but with deep caution from her most recent discouragement. “I am in all just such ways punished, you see, for failing in memory at the right moment, or perhaps quite disregarding at that moment, some advice as to Frenchwomen for maids from a dear friend! Allow me confirm that good advice now, Mrs. Rugg!”

The reply to this held her nerve-taut.

“I do understand, and I have proffered that advice myself, I admit, Madame de l’Etoile. And I give advice even more nowadays, but scarcely about ladies’-maids. The column of advice I give in my paper, you see, is, between ourselves, rather for ladies’-maids, and *love-lorn* ladies’-maids, at that, Madame, than for *ladies*! Then, as relief from it, I have, as you see, these interviews with, for instance, great opera-singers!”

For a long instant, Wanda was without return of words, as she strove not to judge the thing, but simply to get away from it into a harbour instead of a quicksand of topic. So huge had it been with possibilities of cruelty, whether fully intentional or but partly aware of its iron, that she by instinct refused to believe life had done this to the woman before her, and forcing to an end her breathless silence she said:

“It is a pleasant omen for our interview, that as I

chose 'Etoile' for my professional name, so have you chosen it for the name of your instrument. You write for your *Star*, these pretty column matters, and your interviews with singers and so on, for—for what you call your 'fad'? A happy omen—I the singer, you the interviewer, 'de l'Etoile'!"

Dofia Rina smiled ruefully. "'Fad'? Far from it, Madame! I do it to earn my living!"

The sad, strange little English word "rue" written so unmistakably though so unconsciously in that smile had swept away from Wanda all fear that there was deliberate cruelty in this woman before her, whether bitterness indeed were there or not, and her swift words were in a helplessly spontaneous impulsion.

"Oh, I am so sorry, so sorry!" she cried.

"I—I am quite proud of my profession, Madame!" As she spoke, Mrs. Rugg flushed slowly and painfully.

"Forgive me!" cried Wanda, wounded and flushing in her turn. "Believe me, I am the happier on that account to give the interview. Let us make it a notable one. If you will come on Thursday afternoon to the opera house, I am then rehearsing, and you could see and learn much of my work from the rehearsal. Then if you will come afterwards here and dine with me at home, whereat I could be leisurely with you, I can tell you all of the personal little things and matters. So?"

"You are gracious, Madame, very, very gracious! It will mean far more to me than you can imagine! I cannot thank you—not rightly!" She rose abruptly. "Your tea was delicious. As you are to give me so much precious time on Thursday, I will ask no more now."

Wanda too had risen, and a strange incredulous look was gathering in her eyes as the business-like, inexpensively-dressed woman buttoned her small glove. As she looked up and met the gaze of the diva with eyes still unchanged, and held out the small gloved hand, Wanda sought swift courage for her speech. If disaster were to follow it, then disaster; nothing could be worse than the

doubting torture of that ladies'-maids speech, unless similar and subtler torture for hours on Thursday. And when she took the proffered hand, she did not release it.

"Mrs. Rugg, let me tell you something—something that may be quite ridiculous. If it is, will you forgive me?"

"Certainly, Madame de l'Etoile!" And Doña Rina's voice held a *timbre* of surprise made fully courteous by its ingenuousness.

"My mind has the strange thought, Mrs. Rugg, that there has been a very great mistake between you and me to-day. I cannot believe it possible, yet something seems to say to me that—that you do not remember me—that—that you do not know who I am! Can I have been right?"

And lifting one of her hands from the one she had been so firmly holding, and still held, Wanda reached to the wall and flooded the room with rose radiance. They stood looking long into each other's eyes, a vague mystification that had been in Doña Rina's slowly growing into doubting joy and amazement—the dark eyes very big, her face quite white.

"You—you are not——"

"Yes!" cried Wanda. "Yes I *am*, Doña Rina!" And with one mutual cry they were in each other's arms.

A few moments later they were seated again, opposite each other, their chairs drawn near together, their hands clasped.

"Then I am so—so very different, Doña Rina?"

"You wonder—you—you *miracle*! And I may call you, as in the old days——"

"Call me Wanda, dear, if you will. The other is so long dead, I—I—Do you object to Wanda?"

"Whatever you like—Wanda. Though I will *think* you in Spanish, and I fear every time, you being now only more *you*! Dear, dear Wanda, I can't believe yet! I see the miracle before me, finished and identified, and can't yet believe what you've done—truly, truly as I believed in you always! To think, I have actually seen

you and heard you several times, and have never suspected! And not that I ever forgot you, dear. Perhaps it is partly because the opera for me nowadays means the gallery, or no opera—and in spite of my ‘Etoile,’ too, for there are no press tickets for newspaper-men of *my* kind, unless I were willing to go through a bull-fight for them! And I haven’t had this fortunate *Star* thing long enough to do that with safety anyway. And I was thinking of you *especially* when I got it, and had to choose a name—of you and of opera, dear, and what you said that strange, sadly beautiful day in the Place de l’Opéra about finding a name pretty enough if circumstances were! Well, you have found your right one, dear, dear Wanda, and mine, if you and I may not enjoy it, will probably please that fateful maid of yours, if she knows a word or two of English! It is Betsy Bliss! So, actually I have sat up there at the opera listening to you, watching you, and thinking, ‘Oh, if only that could be my dear little maid, my dear little strange genius! Where is she? *How* is she? Was I right, was I strong, to allow her right, for all her noble strength, that terrible Paris night?’ And it was my dear little maid, all the time!—oh, my dear, my dear, what must you have thought at what I said about ladies’-maids—*love-lorn* ladies’-maids? Why did you tolerate me here one instant more? Because it was you—*you: sweet!*—Wanda, it passes belief, this thing that you’ve done! For not only does a new soul shine from your eyes, but—beautiful? My dear, you were pretty, God knows, the prettiest thing I ever saw. But now—but you know what you are!”

“Yes,” said Wanda, through her tears. “But with it all, you know what I w——” But Doña Rina’s hand went swiftly, imperiously across her mouth.

“Well, well, but I am of no importance, Doña Rina, when I find out that you are poor, you! It is my turn for how? And why? How can it be?”

“Simply enough, dear. The world is that way. You said as much, the first night we knew each other! As

it chose to happen in my case, all my money was in stocks, and one day they went, that's all. The only particular how of such cases, dear, is that they're over at three o'clock in the afternoon, precisely, instead of some indefinite hour of the day or night, as might be in some other form of the same thing. Nothing is truly safe in this world—no *money* thing. The only way one could be safe would be to have so *much* money, in so many different things, that the world itself would have to end to end them all!"

"But, Doña Rina, *I* am rich now. So rich as I think you never were, though of course I do not know. And between such friends——"

Wanda had launched plunging into her words, for the best wave-away possible of the history she daringly hoped to submerge, but it rose inevitably before her with all the strength of Doña Rina's intrinsic philosophical rights added to that of its own indelible facts like a thus doubly sturdy breakwater.

"No, Wanda, no." And quiet and firm as the words Doña Rina's hands grew gently tighter on Wanda's. "Dear, do you remember when *you* had to start in to work, and I begged you to let me help? That terrible Paris night I've already spoken of? Of course you remember! And would you let me? And did I press you? No, I understood. So it must be now. It is life. It is what you used to call reverently, almost sacredly, *La Via*—*La Gran Via*. And also, it is turn and turn about."

"Oh!" cried Wanda, helpless, indeed a vessel in distress, awash in its own tears. "Could I ever have known you would say the same words to me—just those few—'No. *La Gran Via*'! Dear, dear Doña Rina, it is not quite the same! I was used to poverty, a comrade of it, you have never been! I was beginning early—a very girl! For all your prettiness, dear, you are not! And I had that—that terrible debt to—to Society to pay, that one must pay quite alone, and you——"

"Wanda dear, *everyone* has some such debt to pay.

You may have been solitary in your payment of it, unique, in your own wonderful manner of regarding it and doing it; but alone? Again that word: no. Every member of Society has dues to pay, some in one form, some another, according to different rulings—a generous, general rule that makes Society the big, sweeping association that it is. Do you remember we discussed this, in a way—in the little park under the Pont Neuf—and I told you I had never found out what my debt was? It was the simple debt of *labour*. And I am paying it now.”

“Oh, Doña Rina, you are right, I suppose! But—promise me you are not just paying me back the debt of my own words?”

“Dear, certainly I am not. I never could pay you back for them, for they’ve sustained me, after teaching me. Only in loving you I can pay back, perhaps. And Wanda—the *mantones* that you made me keep—you remember?”

“Yes, yes?”

“That lesson you taught deeply too—I accepted it, when the time came, as a simple gospel like the other. I clung to them till I had nothing else. Then I sold them.”

“I am glad! And they brought you something?”

“A sum that took my breath away—and kept it in my body! Wanda, I never would have permitted it at the time if I had known even approximately! And the candlesticks, dear? I couldn’t—after I realized about the shawls, I’d have kept the candlesticks to light up my coffin, rather!”

“Oh, I am so glad!” cried Wanda. “Not about the coffin, dear, but about the *mantones*—and they have brought a thought to me, Doña Rina. We will talk no more of money. I will grant you to be perhaps as right about that as I was long ago. But a little personal thing. In a short time I go away for my Paris season. My dear, I am downloaded with things I might never wear. Would you let me give you a trunkful of my clothes?”

Doña Rina searched her eyes in silence for a moment.

The Miracle of Roses

"Yes, my dear, willingly and gladly," she said.

"Oh, I am glad! Remember, you have promised. Would you take two trunks?"

"No."

"Three?"

Doña Rina laughed. "You have made me a Cælonian bargainer! One and a half!"

"Very well. But you have reached a poor agreement for I promise you in clothes I am very, very extravagant. And I have a beautiful plan, Doña Rina! You shall come with me often, often, which would be anyway, but *now* and I will have in a *modiste*, and we will have it all done here at home—and with chat? Dio, what chat!—It is arranged! Ah, my dear, let us look at some of my dresses now! And this or that—whatso you might fancy—you would say so, no?"

And half laughing, half weeping, she dragged her in her bedroom, arbitrary as in their strange Parisian day and threw open the doors of closets crammed with wonderful garments. . . .

When they came again into the drawing-room, Eli was entering it.

"Mr. Rutgers has returned, Madame. Shall he come in?"

"Ask him wait a very few moments. I will call." She turned to Doña Rina hastily. "Heart's friend, one of my heart's very dearest friends, believe me or not, God sent you this moment again into my Gran Via to help me to do right. There was another guidance my heart cried out for—a—a matter of violets. I have tried I have faith that in its place some guidance would be, and now has God sent to me a—a matter of roses. We are to be much together, and afterward, all this you can understand. But for to-day—this moment—this little Doña Rina, you will see—you will see Mr. Rutgers often here. Study him. Study his goodness, his generosity, his—his gentleness, Doña Rina. And then, knowing it

as you know me, for what I—was, help me to decide whether—whether——”

Doña Rina, searching her face, grasped her hands tight, suddenly.

“Providing he is all you say—and I can trust you there—whether to accept that happiness in life? Oh, Wanda, you have paid your debt! And you re-pay it, every time you sing! If that would be happiness to you, dear, or even just calm content, take it, take it!”

“Study him, Doña Rina, and his *good nature*—which does not mean in English what *I* mean by it in my hastened English now! Yes, make that study, dear, before you say so! I have been honest with him—as honest as he will allow, which I think in my judgment of this matter has been a fully right amount of honesty. But study it, study over him, before you say so. Then help me, help me!”

She went to the door and called “Arno!”

He came in with a great silver-twisted mass of purple violets.

“She is still here, Arno, as you hoped. And they might have been roses, Arno, after all!” Exquisitely laughing, she disclosed their stagecraft to Doña Rina. “So, Arno, it ~~is~~ color-de-rosa, and thus much, I was wrong in our talk! Yes, it is a Miracle of Roses!” And her cheeks took on a little of the spoken colour as she met his eyes with the phrase. “Yes, a true miracle indeed, when roses grow from violets—*your* violets, my dear!” And with both hands she held them toward her friend.

“Ah, how I must have—have bewildered you, Wanda, those first few minutes!” cried that friend, holding them tenderly close. “*Hurt* you, if only the word could have any Spanish politeness thus wrong-side-out! And Mr. Rutgers, you too knew that I was an old friend, when I did not know it myself! How strange an old friend you must have thought me!”

“Shall I go for roses now?” he asked.

“It is my turn at errand-boy,” she smiled back, “and

I take my turn on the spot. For I leave with you the most beautiful rose in the world!"

They were standing, for Doña Rina had once more risen to go. Wanda, with a sudden recollection, caught her hand to detain her.

"Doña, I forgot to tell you! I am living now with what a pretty, amusing little friend—of whom I am so fond and who occupies here with me. And you will meet her——"

This was proven very strictly true, for a door slammed loudly, a warm gust of fabrics breezed through the hallway and into the room, and little Daisy, heroic-scaled of hat and sables, was upon them.

In the following swift moment of introduction she was not the flower, but the alighting butterfly—in its breathless interval of poise, a poise through whose perfect mask her eyes, in comprehending Mrs. Rugg, listed two things with underscore that she did not like—"the cut of her jib," according to the item as she afterward read it aloud; and the hand affectionately clasping Wanda's. But with her manner clothed, as it were, in the long trained velvet habit of amenity, she instantly covered the stranger's meagreness of outfit within her gates as by the unlimited mantle of her own gorgeousness, and smiled upon her as though she had loved her, instead of hated her, at first sight.

"Wanda," said Doña Rina a moment later, "you mustn't go with me to your door. But perhaps your very sweet friend will?"

The Apostolic Greco-Russian princess was thoroughly startled at having a courtesy suggested to her, ingenuously as it had been; but she smiled again like a cluster of cupids and led Mrs. Rugg with gracefully fluttering pomp through the corridor.

It was evident that the two conversed before sundering, from the length of time that she was gone. It was more evident when she arrived back on the threshold of the room, her eyes blazing.

"Wanda, what's the matter with that woman? Is she crazy? She gave me a lecture in the hall as if she owned you! To the edification of the elevator boy, she desired me to appreciate you! *Me* appreciate *you*! She wanted me to be good to you and helpful, and to value your friendship! If she's one of those astounding souls that *mean* well, she *did* teach me one thing that I never did appreciate before, and that is the meaning of the word impertinence! Why, Wanda, she had an air of positive proprietorship of you!"

Wanda knew that Doña Rina had not said—would not have been allowed by either her instincts or her life-habits to say—these tactless and hapless things; knew definitely as had she heard it that her friend had made to her friend, in waiting for the lift, some comment as gracious and as graceful as that fair speech to Arnold about the rose of the world. But she knew also that Daisy was not a liar, that she merely had heard the words, whatever they were, in the large type and with the plenteous astonishment-marks of "The Apples of Jacquot-Jacquette" or, nay, "A Modest Passion"; and she was thoughtfully aware, too, that weeks of Doña Rina's visits lay before them, and that there were horns to be seized now, at once, or else a shattered china-shop to be got through afterward. Therefore, though her own speciality in life was singing, having more than Doña Rina's temerity she conjured the bull-fight before her as well as she could, and thus was silent for a long moment, hesitant, then determined, as she replied quietly:

"No one at present in my life has a greater right to such an air."

"Wanda!" The hurt little princess fell limply into a chair, her butterfly wings aflop like *bandarillas*. "This from *you* to *me*!"

The queer little occasional something happened to Wanda's eye-brows as she glanced at Arnold, and her hands went out from her sides in a helpless little gesture.

"People! People!" her lips silently formed, re-

signedly. And she disappeared into her bedroom, leaving Daisy to spring from her chair and run to Arnold, forgetful for once of her jealousy there, and seizing him convulsively by the arm, to burst into unstatelily, familiar tears upon his shoulder.

And Arnold, with something of the tenderness that came automatically, like an exhalation called forth by one specific direction, from him to Wanda—indeed, with much of it, as if this associate receptacle for it were a legitimate and rightly provided one—and with all of the fine and waxless gravity of the elderly youthful, comforted her; petting and indulging and excuselessly ruining the already damaged little royalty as if she had been entirely the small child that she largely was.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE LITTLE RED BOOK IS POSTED

PARIS! Again Paris! Once more Paris!

And I write to you, my darling, from a sacred spot. I have come to the Normandy, in the rue de l'Echelle, and by good fortune was enabled to have what my sentiment desired, the rooms in which I lived here with Doña Rina, and from which I went out to begin over again my Gran Via. I am alone herein now, quite alone—the more so, in an impolite sense, from Elise being with me. How great, how strange, the change between then and this, in my whole life! Yet in spirit, Doña Rina is here with me.

I have told you, dear, how she came again into my life, and of how very altered had been hers in that same interim—(interim is a new word I have just discovered for me on board the ship)—as changed, the other way about, as I have just said was my own. Nor must I pause at that use there (with such a little gulp as I am controlling) of my dearest, my most sacred expression, for that sad fact about Doña Rina has brought about some new changes in my life. And when I called that life “my own,” was I not right, after all? Are not you my life? *Are* you not? But—Foremost (another nautical discovery!) foremost, and I must needs to smile between tears as I write it, Daisy has left me. Absolutely left me, José Luis, abandoning the steamer we have months ago engaged for together, and barking a week before me. (Something wrong, but I am hasty, I am troubled, and together upon all I sing to-night.) And all this from little Daisy, my pretty-petalled little Marguerite, on account of Doña Rina. She *would* not understand. Noth-

ing could *make* her understand. Doña Rina in those remaining weeks was much with me at our rooms, and Daisy was polite. Polite so as to grieve one. Then when Doña Rina would go, tears, anger, resentment. At last our *modiste* matters ended matters. She said all that was not "dress-making," a word she had herself taught me for it, that it was instead "too much," which seems in English to mean not alone *de trop*, but something more extravagant. She could not contain it in her disposition, and in a rage she sails for here, nor has she written to me nor has she been to see me. I believe her intention is to reside here and go once more into French society—as much, I suppose, as she can without a husband. So much I judge from the *Herald*. The French papers are more strict—they do not mention her.

But my darling, line by line I put away, and put away, what I must tell you, and which trembles my pen as I write. . . . Let me then plunge in, my own, as into a new rôle of which, when the last moment and the actual moment of the orchestra demand, despite all my protests that I am not afraid, I *am* afraid. . . .

My own, my darling (how I hesitate, and how I turn, desperately, to that beautiful English word!) a great, great difference has taken place in my mind, and I talk to you for the last time—for the last time, to you, my breath of life, my José Luis, my own.

I have wondered, tormented myself, how I would tell to you what has taken place, for "taken place" is right for this thing which is a matter of but my mind, not my heart, so that I did not say, in my pitiful guilty conscience, taken place in *me*. And now, after all, it is already told, and in that one sentence that I wrote, you know. "You know"! Oh, oh, pitifully, how pathetically, I still write as if you had read, as if you were to read! Well, it tells how near has been your presence in my soul, my own! And to me, with that one sentence you know, you who are never to know!

It was not because I found the name for that part—

this part, ending to-night—of the Great Way, my own. A word I found, yes: Quandary. Quicksand. Quicksand is better, no, not better, *nearer*; but it was not quick, it was slow torture. Perhaps I will one day find out from some better knowing of English that Quicksand was right indeed. But it remains that no *name* did I find, a name like Epiphany, and Wilderness, and Valle Malo. Only that *word*, *quandary*. And so it stayed to the end, the end of my dear Nueva York, in every other wise so strangely, queerly beautiful—*quandary*. Even with the telling of it to you, from within, even with lovely Doña Rina, from without, as if God had sent her to me in my need in place of my beautiful Isabel, so it stayed. Quandary.

And this, despite I will confess that all that became mine in vision from Doña Rina, was of nature to sway me toward just what *has* taken place with me; quandary still, despite that, in my very fear that *too much* did she consider it right, through her love for me, I struggled against her.

And then on the ocean, on my solitary, empty voyage across, a lonely space in the Gran Via, because my dear, dear Maestro is afraid of large fishes and monster-disasters and stays shut tight away below, having been left by little Daisy, having left Doña Rina, with time and space—wonderful, calm *space*—in which to think, I fell victim, my own, my José, to that picture of peace and rest—and—and love, love given beautifully, undemanding. I saw the great waters stretching away, I saw the vastness of distance, the magnitude of distance and of chance, I saw the magnitude of shipwreck in solitude, and these matters came upon my mind and entered it—the vastness of your distance from me, my own, my beloved; the safety from chance and from shipwreck in the harbour of the love he offers me. I began even to think, “Is The Other *right*—is it *right*, in the presence of this that God and Arno offer me in fulsomeness?” . . .

God forgive me, I turn from you—from my own—to

him! In what way will the past spring up to blight him and me? Can it in *any* way? For I have been honest! And he has answered always, "I am not afraid. If it should come, I would face it for both." Then if *he* does not fear, need I? Need I fear for him, for us, him and me?

So at last I have told myself, "Perhaps *this* is what the gitana could not see. Perhaps *this* is what was *meant*. I will."

I have not yet told him. He has reached Paris to-day, to see his little sister and to know her fiancé. He brings that little sister here soon, before the Opéra. And I will have this news for him.

How I dread that little sister, lest she instantly read me! Yet there I know I am a coward, and a very wrong coward. I have thought much of all that, and I am sure, *sure* that I do not wrong her. Yet strangely I could wish that she and this meeting were not for to-night.

It is with a curious calm, after all, something of that ocean-calm, that I have told you, José Luis. The words have seemed cold to me as the pen made them. Yet the pen shakes, my own; I can promise you, that my heart pounds in a smothered way, crying out to me its reproaches at what I do to it. . . .

I must tell you that last night, what without even little Daisy to throw books at me, I was so lonely that I made my will, trying to school myself away from some of the notorious temperament and carelessness of opera-singers, according some papers and teachings of attorneys, and having told you of dear Doña Rina's sudden poverty, now I can tell you that if anything should happen to me, such as a cyclone (for that same calm ocean spoke of cyclones too, till I could not but sympathize my poor darling Maestro somewhat) then Doña Rina would be suddenly wealthy again. I have told you that in spirit she was with me here. Let me tell you that night before last, was my opening at the Opéra. I sang Mimi. The first time I ever heard Mimi, was here at the Paris Opéra . . . and with Doña Rina. . . . Has my little red book after book

told of that night, you who are never to read? Dio! . . . And now, the Opéra was sold out on *my* account—*mine!* . . . so that I knew I was to be greatly welcomed. Yet in my loneliness I dreaded it. From Daisy, not a word, not a flower. I told myself over, over: "Doña Rina is with me! Doña Rina is with me!" All the first act I said it; and then, to my dressing-room a cablegram is brought to me: "I am with you. Rina." How right I had been! And poor Doña Rina, with her little, little salary. To her, a cablegram must have been very—oh, exceedingly—expensive!

But my own, my eye has glanced the clock, and it creeps toward the Opéra.

And before that—ah, before even that, my darling, it creeps through the moments left to you and me! At any minute now, they may be here—Arno, and his little, happy sister, who may not be quite so happy if she reads into my soul—that soul that I have so daringly declared was entirely new! Her name is Mary—the pretty English "Mary," to my ear, whether from musicalness or from prejudice, so much prettier than Marie or our own Maria. If she is as sweet—as simple—as her name, surely, surely I need not be so frightened of her!

My own, how much there can be in a name! As long as I shall live, I shall have a strange—no, never *that* word!—a sweet, a heavy feeling, yes, sweet and heavy both, like the scent of violets, through my heart at sight or sound of "José Luis." Have you liked, I wonder, my own chosen name, José Luis? The de l'Etoile, was for aspiration; aspiration with a memory-tint of Cadiz and of Isabel—starlight. And the Wanda—well, for euphony, for I had to have a pretty name; while partly, in my strange love of words, though you might, might indeed of necessity, smile at it if you knew me to be telling you this, dear—partly, for the meaning of the word, as I then thought to be, in English—for my long, long journey, my Gran Via, my wandering. For I knew a little English then, that dangerous thing a *little*, just enough not to know the right difference when I chose it, my own.

The Little Red Book is Posted

Ah, how I love you, José Luis! How I will always love you! And how late for me to tell you as I am coming to the moment of sending them, the poor, poor little red book, to little Daisy, my little Princess! Perhaps they will return her to me in tears, a whirling, a stormy version of that silver I have spoken you; and perhaps she will just read . . . and think . . . as one would do, perhaps receiving a legacy—again, a silver shower! . . .

. . . As you, my own, will never, now, read and . . . Ah, my own, my José, I love you! Do you remember, I wonder, how there was always a special tendency in my meaning when I would say but “José” instead “José Luis?” I used *then* to wonder if you knew I love you! I love you! . . . And you are never to You are never to know, more than you knew *then*. Elise, dear, is answering the telephone. Perhaps she is already here, my own! . . .

Elise was crossing the room to her.

“Mr. Rutgers, Madame, and Miss Rutgers.”

“Send word I will go down in a few moments, Elise.”

Wanda took up her pen bravely, but it scratched very awkwardly across the page.

Yes, it is they, waiting for me. For the last to-night it will be for you that I sing, my darling! how I will sing! Believe that! It is *Traviata*. . . you, for the last time. To my own, for the last time. How I will sing! After this it will be for—my new For—my husband. . . .

Good-bye, good-bye, my beloved, my violet-eyed own! Good-bye, my José Luis, you who are never to read my little red book, in which my red heart cries to you! I post it to the little princess. . . . Good-bye!

I turn from you to those who await me, represent

my *via nuova*—who know me only as Wanda, Wanda of the stars. I turn to them from you——

After I have to you, O my dream of God,

Signed myself

DULCE DE L'ETOILE.

The pen dropped to the desk with a sharp, unaccustomed little clatter. Resolutely, she drew from their small case the preceding little books, resolutely placed them, with their latest comrade, in a heavy linen envelope, directed it. Resolutely she brought out her jewel-box, closed together the intricate little travelling-desk, handed the jewel-box and her little keys to Elise. Resolution failed only at actual sealing of the strong, long envelope. She knew that even in this it would not fail, downstairs. She stood with it held shut in her hand, her lips, tremulous a little, compressing to firmness as her fingers increased their pressure.

"Elise, make me the favour to give me my rosary."

"Oui, Madame."

With a little breath sharply indrawn, she took from Elise's capably prompt hand and placed around her neck the delicately sumptuous cord of gold and crystals with its minutely carven emblem of sacrifice.

"Have you my cloak?"

"Oui, Madame."

They hurried through the corridor and into the lift. Below, in the long brilliant entrance-hall of the hotel she walked swiftly to the desk without glancing toward the reception room.

"Give me a messenger, please, to carry a letter for me."

"Certainly, Madame!" The response in English, with an English *timbre*, for the clerk was a Londoner, sent a sick little pain through her heart. She knew telepathically that this youth knew she was in pain, and for better strength she did not meet his eyes. "Come this way, boy!" She walked toward the reception room,

The Little Red Book is Posted

the messenger at her side, her eyes still tensely lo
Before the two steps leading up to the little roo
halted.

"Read carefully this address!" She was holdin
big envelope before him, not releasing it. "The
is valuable. Take a cab. Give it only into the
of Madame la Princesse herself. If she is from hom
you are not allowed to wait, return it to me at the C
I am Madame——"

"de l'Etoile, distinguée du monde, Madame!"

"Thanks. Give it to no one but myself or my
There will be instructions at the Opéra. You kno
maid, here? You understand?"

She nodded toward where Elise hovered with
wraps in the background.

"She will give you cab money. You understand
fectly?"

"Oui—oui Madame!"

She lifted the envelope toward her lips, the c
process of so sealing it a stored-up excuse for a
a stealthy caress, but her gesture changed.

"Wait! You have a pencil? Quick! Thanks."

She opened back the flap and scrawled has
tremblingly across the inner side of it.

"Once more, once more, good-bye, my own! I
see the two standing there, watching me, waiting fo
to come. It is over! I turn from You! Good-
Good-bye!"

She sealed it, handed it back to the boy, felt him
ish. Then her body, almost automatically, took its
step on toward the little reception room, toward the
lives, the new life, patiently waiting to receive her t
But she paused again.

The years that had been hers, playing upon a
instinct of her whole being and nature, bade her c
in one more, a last, deep draught of them, one
instant, while those years yet were actually hers, b
the threshold, and before its crossing. And in im

of self-protection, of armament, as it were, against the first moments of spiritual ache and need that would inevitably be, and perhaps swoop down inevitably soon, after her deliberate tread into the cold, new waters of a life strange to her whole life as heart of a hemisphere to heart of a hemisphere, she sent her glance unseeingly past the little room and let her gaze, as for her final, full-breathing time-flash of soaring liberty, dwell slowly along the wide corridor of the hotel. In the consuming eyes was a great wistfulness—the thing that had stirred pity in the chance desk-clerk, and betrayed it into his voice—and of which she was quite unconscious again now, for she was thinking herself strong. And basically, she *was* strong, for it was almost immediately to the forgetfulness, will-powered forgetfulness for the brief moment, of her awaiting guests that, with the poignant look leaving her gazing eyes, her thoughts centred, for that purposefully seized instant of mental adventure, upon the bit of life-gossamer that was happening to drift through the Normandy lobby as she turned.

The picture, chance or destined, might not, indeed, have deserved the world's very greatest eye in its owner's greatest moment—that, for instance, of an Empress when about to sign the declaration of a devastating war or a merciful peace. But that of the very great singing actress, in her thus-far greatest moment, it did deserve, and also her immediately lavished thought upon it, simply because of the native texture of her minutely appreciative, swiftly assimilating mind, for this *tableau-vivant* was frailly, beautifully odd. It was ugly, it was exquisite, and it was extraordinarily sweet in its grotesquerie.

A short round lady, followed by a starched maid, very much as Madame de l'Etoile herself was rearguarded by Elise, was progressing from the desk, where she had just made a rowdy rumpus over a completely foolish something-nothing, toward the lift, with such naughty oaths, in the rough English tongue, as "Saucy," and "Never again," and "Listen to me," addressed, presumably, to a

vision, floating before her, of the villain-hearted Desk Clerk from whom she had just now swept away.

Despite this public show of untranquil spirits, she was unmistakably one whose like, as the fair Duchesse de Noailles has said, God Almighty would think twice before condemning—namely, a person of quality. Her figure was erect, with its posture not undeservedly haughty, and with something rightly impressive in all its low and curving lines, in spite of her indifference—or perhaps her inclination, even—to her effect upon the casual standers and sitters about. Perhaps this was itself a sign of station. Her walk was emphasized and energetic, though not swift, because of the size and arrangement of her person. It looked like something made by an amateur, with plenty of material, tactlessly disposed; yet her conduct of it was assured and stately. Alongside the enormous round ostrich-plumed queenly hat slanting over her profile, her face, an enamelled net-work like a piece of lace under glass, was pinker than any other face near by. She was an essential, an apt thumbnail comment upon the Heart of the Great World: upon Paris.

But the sum total of her was of small import in the light of her luggage; for held forth in front of her on a level with her angry bosom, with a nice posture of her plump little fingers, she was carrying a quite large and very lovely birdcage. It was not of modern gilded kind, but was made of slender sticks, or of reeds, or wicker, and was round, and conically topped, and placid and charming, and suggested England, and a rose-trellised haystack, and pure poor girls named Amy Ames by the poet Laketalk. And in the cage was a treasure possibly unique, and anyway delicate, poetic, precious.

It was a pair of parakeets; and their wondrous beauty, so singular that it lifted above the exotic, was as instantaneously arresting, and in its appeal as refined and as primitive, both, and as irresistible, as a spray of moss-rosebuds with their minareting leaves, or an old-fashioned filigree valentine.

The spiritual effect of the two parakeets, through the sense of sight and its action upon the imagination, was indefinable in its thrill—elusive, confusing. But the means of their unescapable effect of æsthetics were static and tangible and swiftly known: their colours, which were at once most definite and most conservative. It was their wealth of these, perhaps, together with the fine natures of the various hues, and the unprecedented combinations of the opposed yet juxtaposed styles, that made these parakeets almost ineffable. They were rich, and they were startling, without any brilliance whatever. They were neither large nor small, but approximately on the scale of tanagers; and this medium size prevented their being flagrant, like the great parrot-prides of public gardens, whose looks shriek like their voices, yet also gave happier leeway to the delicious painting of their habits than would have done the measure of the little slaves that tell fortunes for twopenny idiots in the streets. Their design was simply rings, or circular stripes, like that of any other parakeets that are designed at all; but where the average parakeet is almost all over a plain vivid green, with a contrasting headdress and perhaps necklace, these fascinating creatures bore a numerous succession of other than green colours, in widths symmetrically marked, some broad, some narrow, from head to tail—wherein, in a few of the stiff, down-pointing feathers, was their only green, as if here alone they chose to display the conventional basis of their uniform (they were quite alike, like soldiers); and even here the trite green was obscured by other feathers of heavy red and yellow. This last fact would have had them from the United States; yet their heads and shoulders, and the colour next, were a soft, dull, soothing red and a soft dull blue, as if instead they were the unparalleled Rosella-bird; and after that, carefully interlined with strips of dove-toned gray and heavier cordings than this of the favourite blue, were many circlets, properly formed as bracelets, of divers suavely graded shades of colours of

roses, as if their native place were India. A curving little plume apiece, one inch in length, curled piquingly backward from the head, and was lavender-tinted.

Even with their beauty so prison-striped over as it was by the bars of the cage, the sight of them was adorable, and not the least devastated by their cries, which they sent angrily forth by infection from the lady, using all their small bitter voices sharply and tartly, as if they saw before them, too, the vision of the Clerk, and were helping her screech at its black, black wickedness. Of course they did not and were not; as birds are the most unintellectual of all supposedly intelligent creatures, next to fishes. But opposite to fishes, they are sensitive, and the parakeets, by dint of vocal nerve-centres, were in full sympathy with their mistress, so that if that Clerk had a conscience in the matter, their noises must have racked him. These were to the effect in general, though not specifically, that God Almighty certainly would not have had to think twice before condemning *that* person, while the details were of a more worldly tenor. In a voice of tinkling metal she was saying "Saucy" again, and "Leave to-morrow," and the parakeets repeated these in the noise named "squawk": "*LEE—EE—VE!*" "*TO-MORROW!*"

To the curious among the people by, it would have been a pleasure to learn what the big see-saw was about—whether her dinner or a lost diadem. But she did not seem one to be approached by strangers. She even said "Outrageous!" now, and the parakeets said, as best they could, "*OUTRAGEOUS!*"

Then, suddenly, as they quite neared the lift, her passion changed its nature. Having by accident lowered her eyes a little, and thus abruptly seen her parakeets, and totally forgetful of the Clerk, with her free hand she hurled wide their prison door, and bade them out with a lingeringly dulcet, loudly ecstatic cry to them:

"*O-o-o-oh, my ravishers!*"

She probably did not know what ravishers meant (for

there was nothing in her appearance to suggest that she did, from experience). But her cry, at that, was conspicuous. Folk were staring—and some of them, more at her than at her parakeets. But Madame de l'Etoile's absorbed and absorbing look was not a stare—it was of the nature, still, of an earnest, deep and trenchant, pregnant gaze. There had come to her, at first sight and sound of the distinguished lady, a tantalizing reminder of someone else, its full reminiscence seemingly ungraspable; then her struggle for it had ceased as she had seen the dainty rarity in the cage, and another cell of memory had been stirred instead, and, swiftly, its full vision had leapt within her—a vision of quiet poppy fields at evening, of a little white house on the highway of a hillside, of a tender woman, and of a strange company of many little birds. And then, as if upon the strength of this, the first matter of memory recurred and crystallized. It was the tenderly beautiful parakeets that had recalled the tender woman, and a little hill-town. But what their great lady of indignant importance had been like, was an angry diva . . . in a little sunlit street . . . in a little sunlit seaport. . . .

At her rapturous summons, the rainbow twain had fluttered forth and upward, thus giving to such sight as was engaged upon them their full romance of beauty, and made an ethereal, tinted hovering in the air, over the top of the cage, whereupon they descended, and with little shiverings, and little sounds and little bites, perched and wooed.

Nodding her head and mammoth hat at them, the lady stepped onward; and all four, the matron (if she were one), and the maid, and the paramour parakeets, went into the lift.

A thought of the woman who stood gazing at its shut door was that it was carrying, in the direction of God, a being of the Animal Kingdom, yet who considered herself apart from it, above it; who was indeed a type, perhaps a symbol, of highest civilization, and yet who represented

in herself the essence of all that was untrue and unnatural; and with her, two little creatures of most humble place in that despised animal estate, yet that represented much, very much, if as certainly not all, that was natural and beautiful.

The tiny miracle of casual life, fragile and diminutive and esoteric as a small leaf in a big wind, had used but a few short seconds. The lively picture was as if it had never been painted; and Madame de l'Etoile knew that she must think of another matter. The two patiently waiting figures so brief a distance from her reclaimed her eyes, as her thoughts.

With head suddenly erect, a smile gathering for the girl upon her lips, she went up the carpeted little steps into the pretty room and across to them.

She gave a hand to Arnold, with a swift, fleeting look of silent welcome; then she looked down into the flower-like face of the expectant girl and took both of her hands in a warm, gentle clasp.

"Ah, my dear, you are your brother's sister! How pretty! How pretty!" Her heart was so rapid, her effort to keep its throb from her voice so tense in its achievement, that she could not hear what the girl was murmuring. Gracefully, she leant and kissed her forehead. Arnold was speaking now—words that also had no distinct meaning for her, and still clasping the delicate fingers that had clung to hers she turned to him with a lifted hand, an irresistible deprecant smile.

"Forgive me, Arno! To-night I am all engaged with your pretty sister!"

She turned again to the girl, and drew her away, gently but swiftly, to a small couch across the room.

"My dear," she said, "there must be a little word between you and me at once. There has been something on our minds, my dear, yours and mine, has there not? And I desire to take that burden from yours now, quickly. I am not going to marry your brother."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE GREAT WAYWARD ONE

THE startled girl tried to speak, but failed, and merely gazed at her confusedly.

"Say nothing, my dear. We will know each other better, for your brother is a devoted and dear friend to me. And that is all. And therefore we can talk some other time, at leisure. But so much it was right for you to know as soon as possible. For the thought must have troubled you—the idea of an—an opera-singer for a brother's wife. Be relieved, my dear."

Again she kissed her, and to prevent an answer moved back with her toward Arnold.

"Friends, I must leave you now. You will pardon me? It is later than I knew."

"But Wanda!" exclaimed Arnold. "May we not take you? We had hoped——"

She interrupted him gently. "I had intended, Arno, that you should drive with me in my car. It is waiting. But I find myself nervous to-night. A singer must be allowed temperament, moods, no? You will forgive me?"

"Yes, yes, Wanda! But are we not to see you again? After the opera?"

"Of course! Call for me! I had most expected it—and you will not disappoint me?"

She saw his own disappointment vanish from his eyes—less perhaps at her words than at their feeding on something in her costume to which they were drawn and redrawn. She realized that it was the rosary, realized with sudden poignancy the deep and planned significance to him of her wearing it. . . . And its mysteries for him

were to be sorrowful, not joyful. . . . Would they one day through the slow miracle of sheer nature turn glorious in those kind, those feeding eyes? . . . She spoke hurriedly.

"And—oh—Arno, do not be troubled that the performance will be late. To-night, it seems, I need one half an hour. I wish to give a *very* fine performance, and you remember my habit to concentrate at the last moment in my car—when I have indulged myself in nervousness! Indeed, I know you will vouch me to your sister, that I am not *very* temperamental—yet we will confess to her how Daisy's tantrum kept that proud New York Metropolitan audience waiting more than a half hour! Ah, of what we will talk at supper, to your sister!"

She was still holding Mary's arm in hers. She released it, touched swiftly, with delicate finger-tips, the delicate azalea cheek. She held out the hand to Arnold. She was gone. . . .

She leaned back in the car with a relaxation of her whole taut body; Elise, intuitive and uneasy, fidgeting beside her, and waiting for her instructions for the machine. It had not moved: in Madame de l'Etoile's very brief but also very adamant code of instructions for her employed, the car never did move, until her direction came (with Elise much in the rôle, as it were, of a telephone) formally as if she were quite likely, any evening, to say "Dalmatia" instead of "The Opera House." And, after a few brief seconds emerging crisply from her collapse-like inertia, she said something quite as startling as Dalmatia now.

"Hotel Richelieu, rue de l'Etoile, Elise."

Reasons aside from thoughts of Doña Rina, and prominently its adjacence to the Opéra, had led Wanda to the Normandy; Daisy for temporary hearthstone had chosen the small Richelieu, with its daintiness, its charm of little street, its creamy flavour and its quiet—not from real appetite, for she enjoyed noise and splendour in hotels,

but from tastefulness, as inherent a feature of her as her nose or nosegay.

Bewildered by her mistress's queer pronouncement, Elise was staring at her.

"*Mais——! Madame——!*"

"Do as I tell, Elise!"

Elise did as had been told; and the surprised hesitation of the chauffeur was turned in turn upon Elise. But Elise had heard the great singer's voice, which she knew better than the public did because she dealt with its speaking character; and by dint of eyes not repetition she proved capable with the machine-god. They shot curvetting into the Place Palais Royal instead of up the Avenue de l'Opéra.

Still Elise did not trust her great lady's mood.

"Surely Madame sings to-night? Madame she knows the hour?"

"Make me the favour to be hushed, Elise!"

Elise made the favour to be hushed; and not because the voice had been unkind, for it had not been. Rather it was electrical with excitement, the excitement of a vividly potential being in a moment of conscious business with Destiny, and that had upon the alert servant an effect of scare. And Elise gulped, with a sudden, miscellaneous remark that was just possibly not a lie.

"I am very fond of you, Madame!"

"You ought to be," said Wanda.

Neither was this speech unkind, for only intention can qualify swift actions, and her single purpose had been to vocalize something that would put a stop to Elise's earnest building of herself into a superlative nuisance that would have to be cast untimely forth from its situation, or even from the car. It had sped on through the big, foggily graceful stone memories of Marie Antoinette and with lightning eventuality into the Champs-Élysées, epitome of Parisian night in its light and length; lampstrung and lovely.

"*L'Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile!*"

The words—in her deep and arbitrary love of words—phrased themselves to her with a suggestion, curiously never thought of by her until now, of significance because of her own chosen name, and she turned to the window, with nervous force dislodged and lowered it, and peered out.

Distant, dim and small, just a smudge on the night, larger, larger, dim but less dim, greyer, the triumphant Arch of the Star was rushing toward her.

Her action had been as impulsive as if the thing would have a message for her; and it did.

They were close upon it now; not very close. And somewhere in its loved familiar lines there was something alien to her memories of it. Rather it had in this fact a quality of dream, thus abruptly recurrent, as swiftly escaping; and she sat back in the car with knitted brows.

For the third time to-night, and in a distance of but few minutes only, though indeed minutes of so innumerable thoughts, memory in its special sense had stirred within her—and stirred her; and this time, as upon the first, with tantalization—in this instance, with its piquing quality infiltrated with the grey colour of shadow; of the spectral, the haunting, the yearning. To reach the diagonal little rue de l'Etoile running sidewise out of the Star they were to pass through the arch, and it must be looming at them now; not yet upon them quite. Swiftly, she leaned again from the window.

It was in no real interest in an unusual aspect of the great monument, but in the driven-human instinct, tantamount to impulsion, that sends the mind in hot hunt of the thought that evades it. And she leaned now far out of the car, gazing up and ahead, and more and more having to lift back her eyes, at the blue-green inky sky and the softly grey arch daubed meltingly against it.

Again, Paris held for disclosure to hers or to other passing and chance-attentive eyes a scrap of its incalculable odd straws of humanity, mood and conduct. The queer something about the Arc de Triomphe was a figure

upon its top, stilly postured, vivid as a symbol, statuesque, yet unmistakably stranger to the stone, indubitably human. And it was desolate, in its impression, too; a ripe thing as an opposite, in her hyper-keen perceptions of to-night, to the sort-etching of the wide and low figure of the angry lady of the parakeets—flotsam of Paris, as she—possibly!—jetsam. As a very modelling of Solitude in the whirling, lit metropolis it stood there, a thing of the mists, as high and lonely as a loon; and those grey mists, that may have been an effect more of the great grey arch than of the night, unlocked her vision to the sought thought: turning themselves, those mists, to murk, and the warm nightlights to the twilights of raw dawn. Mentally, she was seated not in a luxurious vehicle, but in a scow besmirched in the bank of a dry riverbed, gnawing the husks of devoured emotion in strange, hard-passioned words; and in the darkness of the car, Elise's cloak-shrouded figure was not that of her paid hireling, but of a servant of God's House—a nun. . . . She had turned toward Elise, drawing in and away from the vision of mist that had turned brown in her eyes . . . browner than the waltz that had led to all the mist-dissipating light—for a little while—of her life. So thick and real spiritually was the heaviness about her that no start save of pain could have come from her had Elise leaned through it and said, "Look! There on the bank! . . . Tell me, is the tall fine shape like him?" But her thoughts at the captured memory did not stay sombre: even as she had impulsively drawn back from it, the strangely situated figure high above her had proven itself beyond all question human, for its arms had moved, suddenly, as if even desperately, out and upward, and her last second of her totally short glimpse of it had carven it in her mind as a thing of immense and lonesome aspiration. And swift to read into special meanings for herself every chance unusualness of to-night she caught it to her soul as a further writing on her high, arduous wall. . . . "Yes, yes, I am not alone alone! I have seen another soul that craves

and reaches forth prayerfully in the desert with its hungry hands!"

The great arch had swept around them, rushed back of them. With all her rich penetrating love and wide meandering knowledge of Paris, she had not known that one might go to the top of the Arc de Triomphe. To gain permission for such an ascendant pilgrimage at night, what an ardour of purpose must have possessed that searching soul that she imaginatively felt to be so kindred, in its solitude, to her own! . . . Abruptly she turned from her gazing into the light-dotted darkness.

"Indeed, Elise, you must excuse me. In my nervousness, I was but safeguarding a large spiritual emergency when I have said that comment to you."

"Oui, Madame," said Elise.

"Anyway, I have but told you the truth with it, and the truth is the great thing that everybody should look at forever. To go on telling it, you were also right to be worried about the Opéra. My plan at the hotel was to send you there at once to say I am delayed one half an hour, but this matter of the truth filled my mind to carelessness. As it is, you can go from the Richelieu, and in the car, and the management will have become just properly anxious. At my first appearance in opera, Elise, I made the management most *improperly* anxious—you should have heard them, or rather, you should not!—and I gave a great performance—you should have heard me, too! Well, I shall give a great performance to-night!"

The swiftly running speech came to a stop with the car; but below its graphic atmosphere she painted as rapid a predella from step and sidewalk.

"Go very fast, and by the Boulevard Haussmann. Send back the car—instantly. . . . And be prepared for a tidal-wave when I have come! Tell them exactly one half an hour's delay. I will have been three-quarters total sum, yet I am truthful—we will save one quarter by a putting on hastily and a leaving off my criticisms.

You should be happy, Elise, with moreover my singing, for indeed, indeed, I shall give a great performance! Yes, it should be perhaps as yet my greatest!" And with a gesture that seemed to hurl the car forward without Elise's command, she turned and hurried into the Richelieu.

In her quarters, which were the most expensive in this rather patrician refuge, and in better taste despite that fact than was quite suitable to her instincts for gaiety, Daisy was seated, the little red books in her lap and her helpless hands there too, not dreaming that Wanda was descendant upon her, not knowing that her chiffon bow was a mass of ruin from the silver rain that had coursed down her petals, not knowing what to do, not knowing anything definite, in short, except that she was bitterly unhappy and horribly frightened. After the elegantly languaged manner of folks who breakfast abed, Daisy had supped in her own room, with nothing but her title to accompany her, not having imagination enough to avoid such a pass, not even enough to sup i²-th'-dining-room and scrape a flirtation with the waiter. So she had begun to boo-hoo even before the arrival of the little red books.

Truly life had lately been rude to the little princess, and now, after a chilly, lonesome ocean voyage, domiciled here in Paris and in state, her amusement resources were few, and none at all her escapes from the kindless truth that of all rude recent matters she had been rudest of all to herself in her whole whirligig action—ruder even than life, which would have given her a chance; ruder even than she herself, not only in results but in texture of etiquette, to a worthier friend of Wanda's indeed than *she* had ever been (that nasty slinking brown-eyed shop-tailed Mrs. Rugg). It was bitter, this to know. But when Daisy perforce faced a truth, she did it childwise, exactly as she faced a caramel. It *was* a caramel, or it was not. A spade was not an emerald. Or if it was, this would be hard to prove. And with these sad thoughts recurrent

The Great Wayward One

and unconquerable, with eyes tight closed Daisy d her soup the louder. Splash. Gulp. Nor was it she gulped, which a princess would not do, but a lumpy longing for Wanda.

For such a gruesome evening as unfolded there of course, or were, The Apples of Jacquot-Jacque one or two. Delicious, untasted chapters. But least could Daisy swallow these. For a particular and dre memory of her auto-expulsion from Eden haunted apples now.

Toward the New York close, as she was brandi her self-inflicted flaming sword, a question had ari a question that was a very spectre, a hapless thing might readily all along have been foretold; a questi to the real ownership of that priceless volume, para cally priceless, for its market value was on easy re Because of a mutual vice, the vice of shopping, the thing wherein they really liked each other, Elise and I always owed each other money—unless for a very minutes once a month, always; in amounts varying two francs, a case of chocolate, to sixty-eight dolla case of manicure tools. And on the day of Wanda's New York *matinée*, a day of apparently foreord fatalism, when she had from a positively nameless dispensed with Elise's help, and for a rôle, at that, ing more make-up than any other she sang, and Daisy in the apartment debated whether dignity demanded that she give Wanda back the Swiss clock flatly demanded that she keep it, up had grown bet her and Elise, alone together, with no possible rel the hellish doubt as to which had paid for those p apples.

What ensued had one good upshot: that poor clock was put out of its misery for ever and ever, smashed into a myriad fluffs and spirals and s ters, its little voice never to plaint its loneliness again little insides nevermore to whiz.

But that was the only happy thing that happ

for Daisy and Elise had been so absorbed in scratching each other that unfortunately they did not begin to scream until they saw the blood all over Wanda's desk, and the elevator-boy who found them sitting on the floor hugging each other and howling with terror had not stopped satisfied with sending for a doctor but had sent to the opera house for Madame de l'Etoile, and with such proficient acumen that he had nearly ruined a performance of *Aïda*. And Wanda the Coloured Woman had escaped from suffocation in an Egyptian tomb to rush, still at least two-thirds a coloured woman, home to a drawing-room drenched with Daisy's and Elise's blood and to learn at last something of the real meaning, if not the real pronunciation, of the word "catastroaf."

Moreover Wanda could not patch the case with money, her first instinct, for bandaged and helpless and their physician gone, the two white ladies' fright had departed and their anger returned, and neither one would take it. And then the desperate semi-African, either inspired or of phenomenal memory, had realized that she could blackmail Elise, and she did it.

She remembered that Elise had finished the book, and lied about it. Elise got money; Daisy got the book.

But it was an unhappy day, that whole *Aïda* matinée day; for Wanda could not concentrate that night, not even upon her own little red book.

Nor could Daisy concentrate upon it now, as she sat with its multiple of several and their torn envelope in her lap, frightened and weeping in the Richelieu.

When they had arrived upon her in their packet as an ominous dessert to that almost untasted supper, a great heart-leap at the outer handwriting had shot her finger under the flap and wrenched it open; but with sight of the contents, one astonished and confirming glance at the inner script had flashed back upon her a vivid memory of that bright money-gold winter afternoon when Wanda, sweet, grave and gentle, had told her of some such possible contingency as this, and omen gripped her.

From that evening until this one, she had forgotten it utterly; but it was sharply with her now, and after any such odd pregnant conversation, no little princess would have to have read "A Modest Passion," or even "Jacquot," to be excusable for assuming in such as this moment that catastrophe with all its syllables had fallen, or was about to fall, upon a loved Wanda de l'Etoile. And these two novels this little princess *had* read—"A Modest Passion" in full, for the print was still larger; while she had reasons to think that before the very last end of Jacquot-Jacquette there was to be a scene of dragging the Seine for that dainty heroine—another causation than the fight with Elise for not quite finishing it yet, and a rather delicious one.

But to have such an episode enter into real life, and *her* real life, was not delicious a bit, and Daisy quavered, with the little books in her little hands. She believed in her heart, partly because her heart wanted her to believe, and partly from roughly accurate intuition, that Wanda was at the Opéra, where she was to sing "La Traviata" to-night, as she knew from the *Herald*, which she looked in every day for her own name, to find only Wanda's. And this conviction gave her a just respite from as yet calling the police, which would have made her very ill, or seeking Arnold, whose address she did not know. She longed hungrily for Arnold, longed in this emergency to bury her nose in him and drench his bosom instead of her own; but by those little books in her lap she was stirred in too deep a way to yowl for the moon, and her little soul was busy with sounder processes.

Initially, she knew she was meant to read them. So much was patent. The wordless message, the packet's mere direction, said that clearly. And Wanda's assumed interval at the Opera House gave her opportunity, opportunity which might, in turn, cast light—brilliant light. But, as yet anyway, she could not, and she would not.

Could not because of tears, and would not because every basic instinct, every mental habit, every unnoticed

but recorded life-observation of the whole little princess forbade her to, and in issuing the mandate explained courteously that there was a mistake somewhere—if not a sheer mistake, namely one of accident, then a mistake of Wanda's own, the lapsing impulsion of a very great and momentarily blinded temperament.

Then, as the tear-streams partially subsided, read them she did—in part, in a very small handful of little snatches, a cautious, frightened sentence here, a fascinated, awe-struck discovery yonder, and rightly self-justified in both her gingerly action and the decision that came from it, and that slapped the books sharply shut and completely whitened her face with scare and yearning wretchedness. Had the little princess been in the habit of talking to her guardian angel she would have told him now that indeed he had been correct in his rap upon her shoulder.

For these books, the little princess now definitely knew, were not for the little princess, beyond the beautiful and quite sufficient fact of Wanda's love in sending them to her. To read them was her right, by an act of Wanda's will, a right very much such as that purveyed by a will and testament, in this case a will—and a testament!—of sheer love. But that long celestial forefinger tapping her shoulder just as clearly wrote that this was no *last* will and testament.

One more thing would she read, and with a crystal conscience, if she could find it without seeing too much along the road. These already glimpses had been early in the multiple little book. . . . Trudge Market. . . . Society. . . . She sought nearer the end, and with instinct and approximate mental arithmetic, without disaster found the undated day when she had so interrupted Wanda, and they had talked. And here, discovering that it *had* concerned herself, the little princess read . . . to the end of that day . . . and closed the little book, and, other than those early, shudder-stirring phrases, and beyond this special chapter not only meant for her but destined for her, closed it forever, so far as she was con-

cerned; and had the whole Inquisitions, Italian, Spanish, French and German, been distilled into one capsule torture to fit her miniature person and applied thereto, it could not have made her open it again, or open her eyes if it was opened before them.

And covering the whole little red company with their torn envelope that they might not be deluged the while she held them tight clasped on her little knees, she sat there weeping as silently as she could manage, wondering how soon she could pull herself with a decent appearance to the Opéra, and what she would do if she found big startling placards, and not Wanda, there; and was thus sitting when the door before her was flung open.

Madame de l'Etoile had a way, a determined the while a largely unconscious one, of *having* her way, in the minor matters of life, in certain moods. And part of her great way to-night had been to reach the little princess unannounced. The last New York scenes of Daisy's panther-pinwheel chapter of Exodus had given Wanda no straw for belief that the princessly pride would ever be lowered unless beaten down. Therefore when she learned at the Richelieu, where she was not known, that Daisy was at home and that her packet had been delivered, the strange prima donna performed some instantaneous miracle, just what she never knew, nor ever did anyone else concerned in it, whereby she learned the location of Daisy's rooms and moreover reached them before a telephone message could—if, indeed, one ever tried to.

And one long moment afterward, they had reached each other.

In that one long moment of silent gaze, the little covered books and the helpless tear-wet hands in Daisy's lap had told Wanda a plain story, the one she had hoped for; and Wanda's lovely face, its happy relief chasing tensivity away though it still left excitement, had told as plain a one to Daisy—one that might well have made her literally gossip with that guardian angel and tell him, this time: "We *were* right!"

Then had come, without words at first, and afterward with many, their embrace, and Daisy's newest silver shower, and their paddle, on the flood of it, across their gulf; the whole followed by Wanda's swift, almost breathless explanation, for withal her clear-brained self-possession, extraordinary even in view of its business necessity, to-night she was hectic.

It was with an eye inclusive of the merciless clock (a terribly plain one, without even a baboon on it!) that she phrased a vital part of it:

"I had a purpose, dear. It was in the hope to make you understand some things for your own sake; but only if, and when, a greater purpose of mine had ceased, and these *could* be for you. And that purpose had not ceased. I only supposed it. It could not. And I knew that, and knew it not too late for the preventing of great wrong, wrong on my part, only by the grace of God—or Truth. For I knew it one minute, or perhaps less than one minute, after I sent them to you, for a corresponding packet of Truth was that same instant on its way to me, across the hotel corridor. A little vision, a little genre picture, with God's Truth for me in it—painted in it, more briefly and better than any writing of mine has done here—a little, little thing, like the smallest ever found oyster, with the biggest ever found pearl inside. I had been wrong, was planning more wrong; I suddenly knew it, and I did not do it. I had sent you my little books. That was not wrong, it merely was mistaken. I see truth to-night as one can at best but seldom see it—see it even to phrases. Well, what I had sent my little books to you in was not an envelope, and was not a wrong act, but was friendship's whimsical chivalry. Remember those words, dear. The realness of my friendship to you will not be hereafter whimsical. Whimsies I will keep for the Opéra, where they are more in keeping with Truth.—I have some for to-night!—Well, from that pearl-oyster I knew it was in friendship's whimsical chivalry that my little books had gone to you. I came after them.

I thought if I hurried you likely would not yet have read them. And you had not. No?"

"No, darling Wanda!" exclaimed the little princess, gazing straight into her eyes. "I knew I was meant to, but something told me to wait, at least *wait*, and I did, and hadn't read a word! Not one! I could feel there wasn't any letter inside, and I hadn't even *opened* them. I put them right back in the envelope! So I hadn't read even one *letter* of one word!"

And thus with exquisite little lie upon exquisite little lie the little princess built, perhaps for the first time in her life, a big beautiful truth, a truth as lovely and as real as a Dresden china figurine tells in saying it is a princess, when it comprises a truer and more beautiful idea of one than any flesh and blood could possibly do.

And Wanda, seeing to-night only the beauty and truth of this one, believed every word she said, and bidding her for lunch to-morrow, with a last swift glance at the un-Swiss, un-animated clock and a swift yet lingering kiss on the rose-petal lips, sped once more past the still lightning-struck lobbyists of the Richelieu, into her re-arrived and diligently waiting car, and to the buzzing, less patiently waiting crowded Opéra.

In the brief, flashing whirr to it from her recaptured friend, with her thoughts concentratedly organizing for her next task, arbitrarily a chance yet fitting phrase—a not infrequent occurrence—flashed to her from the little red books now held tightly in her own lap instead of her little Daisy's, and with a new application: "'Violeta' itself is a step forward in petal-colour from 'Marguerite.'" When she had written it, she remembered very keenly, she had meant Marguerite Gautier, not the pretty little Goethe-Gounod lady, though she was discoursing of art, and not the pretty little princess, though she was discoursing too of life. And now her word-*penchant* was affixing the notion to Daisy. But none the less, every such accidental thought was grateful to her intensively personal mood of to-night. . . . It seemed but a moment

when the moon-made shadow of the soft, glorious Opera House was upon her. . . .

Even so the performance in the Place de l'Opéra, heart of the world, that night, was more than a half an hour late, for Wanda herself had been almost, if not quite, more than a half-hour late; but that stalled crowd was to be repaid, and over again, for that interval of snapping, rude Parisian boredom.

No more than on that strange little *début* night at the Tivoli in La Gran Via, did Wanda, in business, ever apologize—for anything. It was a trying but a trenchant and worth-knowing fact to impresarios, that de l'Etoile did not have to.

On each of the rare several occasions when she had kept crowds waiting on the edge of their own teeth and ready to hoot, the noise upon her appearance had been rapturous noise, of the kind that could have afforded her, if she had wanted such a thing, a *bolero* snap of her fingers at any director of nerves worn threadbare who, if he had gone after her with a horsewhip, would have found his hand palsied and his will-power devastated by her smile instead.

Yet, that famous smile and all, she was nearer the *bolero* mood to-night as she achieved her dressing-room, unaware of any daggered managerial thoughts or sounds if there had been any—a mood, indeed, of selfishness, for that was what she told herself, in her self-unsparing phraseology, she was allowing herself to-night. It was a lovely kind of selfishness in the main, and its one high point of otherwise, as to one heart in that house that she must make ache on her account if it did not ache intuitively already, she knew she must, for the sake of thousands of other people, not allow to sadden her, for thereby it might sadden her beautiful Violeta.

The room, she found, was unusually full of flowers—among them, a great weight of hyacinth-hearted orchids. She knew, without looking, that they were from Arnold; and having dropped her cloak behind her into the middle

of the floor she lifted the heaviness of ravishing extravagant things and pitched them past Elise into a corner.

She knew that this would horrify Elise, and was not a bit sorry, on that account, to do it; but her actuation had been that she knew equally well that Marguerite Gautier would have done it. And with this keytone to her flower of to-night—as it would bloom to-night at last—her strange hot-house blossom that was violet and marguerite and camellia, she drew forward her elaborate make-up box, her eyes kindling to this newest, perhaps her last actually creative, task of reincarnating Verdi's—Dumas's and Verdi's—de l'Etoile's and Dumas's and Verdi's Wayward One.

With her very motion of those luscious orchids into the corner—hurtling motion, intentional wantonness—she had been making a promise to Arnold, a sacred promise that she would sacredly keep, specifically, to give him, as she had already proffered and would give to Daisy, all the sweetness that could be, in his case all that his pain would allow him to take, from the new self, the renewed being of winged victory that through the remainder of her Great Way she now believed she could be. Her intellect had pitched the orchids, not failing to note and register, as they hurtled, a connotation by the way of that word “pitch” with musical pitch; while her heart had simultaneously made that pact with Truth, and Arnold Rutgers, and herself. And as her fingers dived swiftly into the make-up box now and went deftly about their business, she was still two women; and one of them was hunting for another word—a word that she had spoken to-night, or if not spoken, thought so poignantly that it had valued as sound with her, and thereupon been mentally, and not just mentally but spiritually, pigeon-holed, and it was tagged “Elise.” It was something either spoken or at least hitched to Elise, then, not to Daisy—and necessarily born, therefore, in the car. Something she had long striven for, and suddenly articulated or visualized by chance . . . Desert! . . . That was it.

Desert. That Arc de Triomphe figure—"another soul that craved and reached forth prayerfully in the desert." That was put safely away, then: Desert . . . and as Elise turned to gathering up the scattered clothes and mangled orchids, the two women at the mirror began to merge into one woman.

Once, they paused—rouge-stick in hand, and stared at each other as the word-will-o'-the-wisp danced before her again, now some word à propos of this make-up business, to go with that word Desert. But there would be ample time for thought late to-night perhaps, or if not, to-morrow; and with Desert and this latest uncaptured brain-flash pigeon-holed together, the merger-miracle of the two women became complete.

On the rich pure loveliness of Wanda de l'Etoile the singing actress superimposed the pallid, peculiar mask of her first, youthful braving of the restless, smoking Spanish audience of that Barcelona Tivoli—sheer, dead, white pallor, with lips sharply, intensely carmined; a mask as metallically Parisienne as the strange girl she had shown to the public then, as exotic as the crushed orchids that Elise was resurrecting in the corner. And she drew back her dark hair, parted, beautiful, and unadorned, into a low knot between her naked shoulders—as it had been that night, and as the real "Lady of the Camellias" is traditioned to have done.

When she stood ready, through the overture, trembling yet confident, even defiant, she was a queer, a true, a new, an old Camille; nor did she forget—for to forget anything peculiar to her work of artistry was as far from Wanda de l'Etoile as her arbitrarily chosen name was from the earth—that New York *entrée* of her "Traviata." Paris had never seen *that*; Paris would see it now.

Its spirit, daintily elegant and fascinatingly strange to this portrait of to-night, a magic frame for the extraordinary soul of it, was wafting up to her like a perfume from the great crinoline dress and its roses and rosettes and nature of roses. And when, lifting her arm and

placing it in that of her waiting cavalier, the dazzled cavalier of a protean woman in one vivid *tableau vivant*, she stepped out upon the famous stage to face her Paris and to sing, as the last little red book had promised she would sing for her heart's so nearly lost desire, a hectic flush from her real flesh stealing up through the painted pallor, and paused, with her mouth open, impudently holding back the orchestra and Violeta's first note for a full, breathless, dangerous moment, a visionary, conscious Marguerite Gautier of every facet, false of gaiety, instinct with bravado, a bold-eyed woman hanging to life with one hand while life itself slipped away, a very symbol of the white plague, Paris saw, as Paris so peculiarly can see, and appreciated, and—noised. . . .

And another New World memory flashed back to her, and one that was also another promissory note of the little red book:

"And so must it go on with me as to 'La Traviata,' until I know that she is my final expression of her. That will arrive suddenly, some time, from some strange, great mood. Under what strange, great mood of the Great Way will that be?"

And at that noise, she knew.

In their vivid reversion to her those words, and their answer, were written in radiant letters in her vision now; a writing on that wall of faces before her; letters of phosphorus, on that *sea* of faces . . . that roaring sea, roaring its ownership of her . . . its, the people's . . . that had cast up to where it belonged this pure amber on to a shore of the Great Way . . . and in exact memory of the little book her mind leapt back to, and repeated now, the words exactly preceding those of this present phosphorus: "Yes, I am happy!" . . . and then far forward, though again back, to the same little book's, though not the same little volume's, almost last words of to-night, words, *gracias a Dios*, *not* to be near its last: "How I will sing for you." . . .

"But *am* I *singing*?" she asked herself countless times;

and countless times her own voice answered her, not only with all its greatest greatness of the past, but with a new ring, a new metallic vibration that was tossed, and tossed, and tossed about upon a prismatic architectural bubble of art that she had never felt in her throat, never seen in her farthest vision, before. And that new metal had been a precious, a spiritual metal. Wanda de l'Etoile could have successfully impersonated a fire-alarm any time she chose; but she had never yet elected to sing like a gong and she had not done so to-night. Facets. . . . The first act was over.

The chorus was gossiping, in wondering, slant-eyed groups. And she thrilled at the sight and the little hushing hum of it as she quitted the noise to be folded out by the curtain and made her way to her room; no stack of morning newspapers could have told her more, or confirmed her so much, and at so fair a moment.

"And I did not once look at Arno! Poor boy! That is life——!" But it had happened to be life only because she had not dared to look toward him, until that confirmation just now; until the voice was assured, the figure unbreakable, for the night; until the beginning clamped firmly to the end. Thought of him, she had; and against that thought, side by side with it, she had placed another for counterweight—of someone else hanging, somewhere in that great house of the great voice, on every tone of it, and on every look of her who owned and uttered it, and someone whom she knew she was making happy—and happier, with every tone and every look; someone who, always on these great nights, was miraculously never very far from her, never too close—on great nights of *début*, or of *première*, perhaps a precious chosen inch further away, rather than closer, in his fear of his nerves unnerving her; on accidental great ones such as this, forewarned, it positively always seemed, by some alchemy of intuition, perhaps a few excited inches nearer, ready for her wireless message to come nearer still, or

to go further away; always a shadow, but always a shadow warm and self directing.

And as she prepared swiftly for the second act, phoenixing from the elaborate dress into the delicious cottage one and its odd hat homely as a little house with her face the lovelier under the roof of it, she sent Elise for him.

He, quite as well as she did, knew her voice and her Violeta proof against armies now, and rushed in angrily.

"Thirty-two minutes late!" he cried. "I will go back to my grandparents in Italy! Thirty-two years toward my grave since my supper! I will be a nice, fitting playmate for them now!"

On the golden flecks in his dark brown eyes, unique and fascinating as buttercups dancing in coffee, she feasted for a long instant, love bubbling to ascendancy over her suppressed gaiety, and then, with an impulsion of her whole heart to him, tacit, quite as if they had reviewed together every phase of her recent hours and were met now to decide when to hand down full judgment upon the whole, and calm of demeanour, but with a swirl into their gibberish of a dozen climates, she said:

"Mañana, darling! Si, and I *so* much must talk to you! Ah, ah, mucho, muy, caro—carissimo! Now—instantly—if we but could! But even with Violeta done, at the close I have still work—dutiful, hard work. And to-morrow for luncheon, Daisy——"

His eyebrows shot heavenward like black parentheses fallen forward and then bounced up by their stomachs.

"*Spiders* for luncheon!" he cried.

"Yes, yes, mi caro, Daisy! But that is but a detail of my happiness! And we will be glad together—afterward. Come and take me somewhere—think of somewhere gay! We will be spendthrifts! Come and bring with you all the cigarettes not yet smoked in Paris, to the hotel, at four o'clock to-morrow!"

"You *are* la Traviata to-night!" he cried, and his cry was both a pæan and a protest, an acclamation and an

accusation. "You *are* la Traviata! Wayward, wayward, wayward! Whimsie, whimsie, whimsie! Toadstools for luncheon! Cigarettes! Gaiety! I will be four-hundred and four years old at four o'clock to-morrow!" But his brown pools of eyes were ecstatic as he kissed her hands and left her.

"Elise," she exclaimed, as she did a last bit of construction-work, never let out to Elise, on the roof of her delightfully absurd hat, and mentally christening it for hereafter "the birdcage," with a connoting thought of cottages and of all that had led her to this Wayward One of to-night, "I would like, if I were really insisted upon to an encore, I would really like, to-night, to do it, and to sing 'La Apache'!"

And had Wanda de l'Etoile uncharacteristically indulged this characteristic whim, there would have been in the words, as in the heart there was, a great cry. . . .

And quite suddenly, quite deliberately though so unpremeditatedly, in—and from—the pretty garden of that second act's cottage scene, that great cry did go out in words, words that did not hold its message, but whose golden sound did, and the soul of that sound; went out to seek, if it could, through the mysterious potential or impotential ether, another soul, that was but an unknown figure to her mind. It was toward the close—in the last of her rich musical doings before the poor lover's stripping of love's riches. Always that impending touch of "Manon" in the thing, that quaint touch of book-within-a-book, was dear and real and pitiful to her. And as if everything of this night must somehow concern itself with her Traviata, the figure far up, now far off, on the Arc de Triomphe, desolate and unmistakably akin to herself in longing, came back to her. And in a long, a suffering cry of Violeta's, she sent that heart-cry of "La Apache" and of Wanda de l'Etoile out to it, to answer it, somehow; somehow to comfort it. "You alone are not alone!" it said. And fortified by the strengthening

beauty of so sheer and so pure an act of love, she looked for the first time at Arnold's box.

Instantly upon that swift glance there was a movement there, and through the air vibrating with her voice something curved in an arc before her eyes and fell at her feet. It was a great armful of camellias. Customarily, it was in the next act, in that golden money-shower that she turned to a rain of blood, that opera-house customs were shattered by forbidden tributes to her Violeta. This, came as if life must even so instantly repay that sending of soul bread upon the waters of the air toward the Arc de Triomphe. . . . Life at once repaying an act of pure love with an act of love as pure. For the girl had thrown them. She had seen her. Where, how, had she and Arnold got such a treasurable thing as these? She kissed them as she floatingly ran from the stage. Afterward, she carried them still as she passed silently back of it seen by the audience, unseen by her fellow characters—thus healing the dainty rift they had made in the night's white statue of art with the very wax of them hereby poured into the crevice, and loving them in her Camille's pathetic moment for the girl to see.

But once more in her dressing-room she did a very different thing with them. Elise, who liked flowers at least half as much as she liked birds, was mothering the abused orchids in the worst fit of the sulks of her whole career with Madame de l'Etoile, and Madame de l'Etoile was brilliantly enjoying these. To Madame de l'Etoile the orchids were to the camellias as garnets are to white sapphires. She was not willing to powder the white sapphires as she had powdered the garnets, but she lifted them—high—and gave them one safe, conservative, but horrid-looking shock on the dressing table; and Elise, taken unaware, growled. If she had lashed her tail among jungle plants, she could not have made a more delicious sound; but a little sound, too, had escaped her mistress.

As the great gardenia-white flowers separated under

the deft daring blow, a bit of paper had fallen from them, and totally forgetful of Elise and her fascinating imitation of the zoo, she picked it up.

"As you have just taken my breath away, so you took my breath away earlier this evening. I did not know what to say to you! Madame, oh, dear, dear Madame, I *want* you to marry my brother! I *want* you to!—MARY."

Tears, sad, surprised, triumphant tears sprang to Wanda's eyes. She closed them a moment, lifting the virginal camellias to her face, a face poignant with tender beauty as this strange version of Camille's story rushed through her heart to paint it there: Marguerite's lover's sister—"that distant sister," Arno had called her—begging the wayward one to marry her brother! Dios!...

"Elise," she said, the tears commanded away, "I *can* sing La Traviata!"

"This morning's *Matin* said not, Madame," said Elise.

This news was so piquantly unexpected that Wanda dropped her lip-stick. "Well, well," she silently reflected, "life will have its revenges upon wrong-doing! I indeed should never have given that bird-seed!" But even so she was unwilling Elise should add up the moment's pause she had got.

"A pretty young woman like you, Elise," she said, "should not read the newspapers. They print sensational things, of which that is a sample. You might read of your own murder some morning! Come, Elise, we both know that tremendous ball-dress is sensational—for us as for the audience!"

Her thoughts of Elise were widely different from her words. Even as this de l'Etoile-Dumas-Verdi lady of camellias had waywardly tormented Elise with them, Wanda had been thinking of Elise's happiness, thinking how she had ruined her with indulgence, thinking how she might perhaps pay back for that ruination at any disproportion of expenditure. "It might be possible.

Yes . . . with such persons as Elise, such matters can be done, and rightly enough, by money. . . . And I have enough money. . . . Too much money. . . . Yes, to-morrow."

Money . . . Elise and money. . . . It was the last thought of the emergent woman reemerging into the "Traviata" as Wanda, magnificent in huge black moon-spangled ball-gown, sallied forth into the splendour and the money-torture of her next business with life. After that, a bit of business with death; and then. . . .

The last act was over.

Paris had stayed through even the final dying notes of that act of death; and upon the silence of its passing had once more loosed its thunder.

That dear Parisian noise! . . . resurrecting noise, resuscitating noise, nectar in her collapsible moment of utter weariness—weariness that she pushed aside as if by one swift gesture of her two hands, for the right facing of her next business, the night's last, a bit of death-in-life, she told herself for the sake of her love of phrases; and it was again carrying the great camellias, and pil-
lowed too upon the rich wreck of orchids—it was so she held them, herself a brilliant figure with but the ghost of tiredness in her eyes—that she met Arno and the pretty, eager girl.

Arnold was poised, jubilant at her wonder-night but quiet in the turmoil it had brought him; and it was the girl whose excitement and anxiety betrayed themselves—with a rather sweet frankness, either inclusive or careless of Arnold in her expulsion of them. It was a swift, truthful glimpse for Wanda of Mary Rutgers.

"Do me a favour, Madame—no—*Wanda*. I'm so tired, take me home to the Ritz and go on with Arnold! Can you imagine anyone but you being tired by what you've done?"

Wanda knew it was sincere desire—thoughtful, the girl's best estimate of what might help her brother.

So she said simply: "As you will, for to-night, my

dear!" And to Elise, "The Ritz." There they dropped the girl; at the Normandy, Elise; then at Wanda's simple, ready suggestion "*Les Boulevards*," sped briefly on to some big bright restaurant somewhere along the big curving way of the Italiens and the Capucins. Just where, just what, Wanda never knew; whether the Riche, the Americains; something of the kind, for she had deliberately desired its kind of lights, its kind of colours.

And suddenly, as if the full lifting of clouds from her vision had drunk up for her further ease even the hardest—the one really hard—detail of this long, long vivid road-mark evening of the Great Way, as the wine diamonded between them in the graceful festive glasses, suddenly she knew that Arnold knew—and not from the fair Mary Rutgers, whose truthful words, even whose straight lovely eyes, would never have betrayed her, but from the night . . . from herself this night. And the fact made easier the short, simple sentence that somehow through the facets of the night had crystallized itself for her to speak to him, and fortified her, though in any case she would deliberately have used it, strengthened her for even the word of caress with its possible fleeting instant-fraction of dangerous mislead:

"Arno dear, I am sorry that I wore the rosary to-night."

Nor could she remember afterward, any more than the name of the place, just what his replying words had been—only their lights, their colours. Though she had known, with her combined experience and divination of him, that he would be brave, kind, tender of her, non-protestant, she knew now only the *rare* colour, *rare* light, of it all; only that she had never before either experienced or divined *how* brave, how gentle, how unasking.

And there followed, in clear, undevious words from her, because they could, because the creative mood of the night upon her continued now in her huge weariness as muscular overaction can continue in sleep, a swift, fruitful, few-lined graphic map of what she hoped for—their

love as friends, their contact as before, and as soon, as much, as he was willing for; fruitful, because he took what she proffered, took, thereby giving. And in her gladness at that, she went backward a little, told him a little, the little that was right, of the little she was able, of causes: the lifting of mist from about her right perception; inner mist, because life itself for her had been very simple, if but the vision had been simple too; the clarity of that perception now. She did not tell details; they would have been cruel: the parakeets; the wearing of the rosary intentionally, not carelessly, and of intention of gladness for him; but again a small trenchant map of leading lines displayed the intermediate wrong and the concluding righteousness of her.

There was no cant in her philosophy; there had been none in her proposal of dear friendship, straight as that had looked at, warmly grasped, very simple, time-lined sentiment. Perhaps one sentence of her told the most important of it all: "You see, Arno dear, I knew finally, that it would not have been truthfulness, as truthfulness appears to me to be; it somehow seems not meant that I should ever be someone very far away, and at once very long away, from what seems truthfulness."

"No, Wanda," he said in simple, very deep agreement.

That seemed to base them, take away all confusion; to end something, begin something; and consonant with the night as if she were still *La Traviata*, she asked him to send for more champagne. It should baptize their new era, though she did not say so; and in their wait for it, calmly she leant across the table, serenely indifferent to the bright gay place as she had been in entering with Wanda de l'Etoile written all over her in camellias and orchids, brought his face toward her with her two hands, and kissed his forehead.

Over the new yellow diamonds, and with a pensive look abroad in her eyes, her great night swerved toward an end for them in a little reversion of her to the causes again, but differently now, for it was confiding, somewhat,

confiding a little of some of the groping that still remained for her, just a touch of this from dear friend to dear friend.

"It has something—much—to do with a big word, Arno. You have in English a big, curious word—Sophistication. It is a word easy to understand—at first. I grasped it quickly. And in that quick meaning, it concerned me in Nueva York. Almost all of me there, was that word. My temptation away from truthfulness grew from so very much in me of what that word is. But it was not *throughout* me. No. It is something I should have in me to an extent. *You* have a right extent of it. It is a thing of some rightness, and of much fascination. Well, in my fascination by the word, I found it out more fully, and at more trouble than with most words, too. And thereby, I found out properties in it that are as dangerous as the thing itself. Perhaps you have never thought of them. Well, philosophy is the seeking of wisdom—the seeking or the love—what difference? A wonderful word, a wonderful thing. And a *sophist* was a philosopher, but only of a certain kind. I learned much when I had got back to that word sophist. Can you be patient with my dictions, Arno? Anyway, I have learned many slangs while I am in New York, and one of them, a remarkable slang, is *sheister*. And that is just what a sophist was—a sheister philosopher. And it all arrives to this, that woman I was, or was trying to be, in Nueva York, and all: that whatever worldliness I had came to, and whatever all of it I may keep underneath, I do not think that I am a sheister philosopher, Arno."

He smiled—the old Nueva York smile that seemed to be indigenous to discussions of language.

"No, dear," he said, "I'm quite sure you are not a sheister philosopher!"

"And——" she said, and an impulsive, happily impulsive and vitally eager thought exclusive to this night

notched it once more for them, "and—you will paint another portrait of me, Arno?"

"Yes—dear."

"And it shall be—now that so suddenly it *can* be, Arno—it shall be—*La Traviata*?"

And bravely over his night, all the gladness that could be in eyes so stricken, kindled.

CHAPTER XXXV

CONTRITION

CONTRITION, confession, absolution.

It was to a subconscious rhythm of these golden words that Wanda stirred in the fairly early sunlight—for it was by prearrangement with this second golden matter that she was awakened, through leaving undrawn some of her window-curtains the night before. It streamed in across her bed at a particular angle, and from the rue de l'Echelle, for though it had first arrived at the Normandy from the natural general direction of the Bourse—a soft word about hard matters with always a poignant memory for her—and the Comique—a word with for her nothing comic, because here had been one of her very first really great opera experiences (aside from their own) with her Maestro—her desire for this morning had not been to be roused by it quite so soon as would be from these quarters, and the open curtains were therefore those to the little Street of the Ladder; to her a vividly suggestive name absorbed and pondered by her in her first, strange visit to Paris, when her mistily brooding eyes had drunk in so much that she never spoke, and a name that would alone have called her back to the Normandy if thoughts of Doña Rina had not been call enough. . . .

Contrition. . . . Confession. . . . Absolution. . . . A churchly trinity, yet recurrent and beautifully musical to Wanda who frankly named herself unchurchly. . . . Contrition, complete if possible; and an approach to completion had indeed been yesterday . . . last night. So ran her gradually quickening sun-stirred thoughts, like a little chain of golden links running backward into their

welding to some childish teaching, harsh then, lyrical now, and forward, into this day, which must be made as wonderful a day as yesterday had been a great, a wonderful night. . . . Confession; that would be, this afternoon, at four o'clock, to her Maestro, who at four o'clock would be four hundred and four years old in gentleness and understanding. . . . Absolution; this, too, would be from him, presumably—from him who of all the world alone (barring one distant, ah, how longed-for friend, and to whom indeed, if possibility were, the confession were due!) could comprehend her in a matter so sacramental. . . . Contrition, confession, absolution. And the most beautiful of these is contrition.

But before this spiritual matter at four o'clock, was work to do, hence this notable prearrangement with the curtains looking to the rue de l'Echelle so drenched with climbing symbol as with climbing sunlight; and work far off, if very strictly looked at, from any such doings as contrition, confession, absolution. For indeed, her morning's task comprised a deep-laid plot, a thing of polity, diplomacy—by implication, poisonous, which subornation in though its mildest forms, and though by whatever means, in its last analysis undeniably is.

And to just such an end Wanda, with Elise's help, dressed early—uncommonly so, for an after-opera morning, and even for Madame de l'Etoile, uncommonly well. Therefore it was about only one minute more than eleven o'clock, and Wanda was only about one degree less beautiful than an angel, when she appeared before the hotel desk and began her blandishments.

Her very first was partly ingenuous, for she founded it on a rumour that the simple word "clerk" had a special pronunciation for the British Islands, and consequently she addressed the desk clerk as "Mister Clark," because he was English, and thinking to please him—which, incidentally, it enormously did.

She had purposely not seen his face last night, but had reason to remember well his voice, and found her

day well augured by the fact that it was indeed this same clerk that was on duty this morning. And within a remarkably short time after her salutation she achieved data whereby she realized that if she so much succeeded in her ensuing errand that an acquaintanceship, casually not unimaginable, as well as her object, happened to be provoked by it, she would have added to the very slender peerage department of her calling-list. For the owner of the parakeets, she had learned, was nor less nor other than the Countess d'Orancy.

Furthermore, she knew from this delightful "Mr. Clark," that Madame la Comtesse was an American, and her baptismal name Paulownia; with addendum that she was absolutely the only American (or if not quite that, Wanda judged, at least one of the very few million Americans) who had ever gotten so much as one golden hoof inside the real—the survivant and actual—Faubourg St. Germain. She knew the floor, direction, and number of the countess's suite; and, most important, that unmolested she might go there, in line with her proceeding last night at the Richelieu, unannounced, regardless not only of the general hotel rule, but of the additional private and personal and adamant very particular rule of this very particular countess. She had learned with certainty, as indeed she had surmised before she came downstairs, that "Mr. Clark" was not in love with this countess, because of that same violent scolding that he had got so conspicuously in public last night; and had gleaned that, on the other hand, "Mr. Clark" was by now quite as definitely in love with herself, so that she had caught herself considering just which rôle she would seem prettiest in to the very young, to give him tickets for; while as for her nefarious undertaking, she could go forward with it assured that her admirer, "Mr. Clark," would, in case of fire, for instance, any such dido as the countess had clipped up in the lobby last night, take all blame upon his own shoulders, indeed, tell any lie whatever for Madame de l'Etoile, such as that himself in person had

taken her card and explanation of her mission to another suite, and given them to a thin, beautiful young woman in mistake for the countess.

As Madame de l'Etoile went thus fortified upon her buoyant way, tabulating her data and her advantages, Paulownia seemed to her a most lovely name. She did not know as yet (quite likely because "Mr. Clark" himself did not know) that it belonged along with Daisy in the botany rather than the peerage department, signifying a tree that for a very brief season blooms luxuriant lavender blossoms and then for the rest of the year drops garbage all over the Southern United States, and especially all over Virginia. "Paulownia" sounded stately and beautiful to Wanda, and she assumed it a derivative of Paul; while the suggestion of Virginia added to it led her imagination, as she ascended peerageward in the lift, to visualize helplessly the stout little countess as prancing rudely naked through a wood in a storm, with a gentleman, likewise immodest or thoughtless, prancing beside her, and a useless if artistic fabric flapping over their heads. And this hapless instance of her reckless tendency toward association of ideas brought her up short before the countess's door, in a moment of distinct pause to control it and at least temporarily do away with it for the proper furtherance of her purpose, which was no more nor less than by any means short of positively foul to achieve, acquire, possess, own and thereupon irrevocably depart with, those parakeets.

With the countess reconstructed along the plump, clothed lines of last night's angle-hatted vision of her, and bulwarked by thoughts of first aid, in event of physical jeopardy, from that entrancing, that positively *caballero* Clark Esquire, Madame de l'Etoile knocked; and was replied to by the starchy train of last night's pageant, the spick maid of span similarity to Elise.

Madame was conducted in without furore; and with her name deposited orally on this maid, quite casually as if its engraven tablet had preceded it, was left alone. She

discerned chiefly, rising among knick-knacks, what-nots, and other trash-basket elements of the dictionary, a magnificent piano, with a hoary name that spelled perfection of its period, the kind of piano that people are born and brought up on, and that seemed to her to be dreaming that it dwelt in marble halls, and about to talk in its sleep of how much nicer *Rigoletto* is in English than in Italian, for example, where it says "Over the Summer Sea" in place of "Women are Unreliable"; and just as it did turn over on its elbow and mumble to her that it was part of the countess's trousseau and had come to Paris with her in a sailing-packet, its mistress (doubtless its mistress with a naughty little-finger always high in air if the other one had to be touching it) interrupted the singer's reverie in person, and without a single naughty-mistress-motion about her.

She was hatless, which astonishingly lessened her portentousness; her cracked enamel was much pinker and more cobweb-like by sunlight; and the more than ever rotund little temple of her soul was habited to-day by a tight-fitting dress of huge Scotch plaid.

She had exquisite manners, and spoke exquisite French, in a high, tinkling voice that had not a syllabic dissonance anywhere in it, and that had made even the rowdy rattle of last night a sort of corrupt, *à la mode* music. Her little pink hands appropriately wore marquise rings, and suggested that she had somewhere about, though not to be let loose in the morning, a pet diamond turtle. She sat full in the streaming sunlight despite its gossip about her enamel, the little hands folded every time between each two French gestures, and on the edge of her chair, her little back so straight that Wanda's, similarly postured because she was a guest, and an unbidden one at that, began to ache from the psychology of it. Obviously Madame the Countess had assumed that the mission of the interesting and beautiful woman before her had not been wound upon horns in advance through some new villiany (which was quite true) of that saucy clerk

downstairs; but no urge or overt expectancy came from her, while it was also quite as obvious that she expected illumination in due time.

"Now, why is that woman a lady, and why am I not one?" thought Wanda transiently, and with a transient sigh—equally transient, because it sprang from a brand of thoughts that in all innocent unconsciousness phrase themselves as truths, while subconsciously they automatically function as lies. Facts. . . . Truth. . . . That mysterious, sublime, eternal difference! . . .

The two ladies had begun, and were continuing, to discuss and to a fair proportion of agreement settle, various matters of concern to the State, if not the Universe: That it was how very pleasant to live in Paris, especially with spring in the air—that anticipatory sense!—and especially, too, at the Normandy. That indeed, the Normandy was very charming, and fairly set up, except that living in any hotel, any, there were always, and indeed must be, one admits, hotel clerks. True, but, well, there were Clerks and Clarks. The one downstairs was handsome,—surprisingly so. Handsome? Possibly, yes, but saucy. *Very* saucy. Oh? Well, handsome people were more likely to be saucy—the world spoils them more. Doubtless one *got* more from people, if one were handsome. And à propos of that, how very handsome, on the whole, American people were, Madame de l'Etoile having just come from a visit to the United States, bringing away with her that impression—good-looking, that was, in such a *varied* way, and especially the women, as compared, for instance, with madame's own race, the Spanish, who were apt to be of but one pattern of good-looks, or with Frenchwomen, the best-dressed in the world—variety *there*—but uniformly homely. Madame de l'Etoile, with her happy memories of the appearance of Americans, indeed planned to return to the United States, and to travel more, especially to the South, about which she had enormous curiosity—as yet entirely unsatisfied, beyond acquaintance with one product from there, which chanced to

have come, by the way, from Richmond, Virginia, an extraordinary article for the toilet, named "Lovers' Kisses Soap," which Madame did not favour herself, because of the nature and quantity of the scent in it, but of which she had given a gross to her music-teacher.

And here Wanda, who had in truth become almost as fascinated by the delightful countess as "Mr. Clark" below stairs had been by herself, and borne so favourably onward by her subject of the rumoured South in general, clasped her hands forward with a most earnest exclamation:

"Tell me, are you a cruller?"

After a moment's interval of bewilderment, following all too soon on her recovery from a passing fear that this fascinating visitor had come to sell Lovers' Kisses Soap, the countess replied that she was not a cruller; nor a mulatto, nor an octroon, nor a coal-black negress. "Nor," she concluded with clarity and startling suddenness, "any other kind of a Spaniard, either!"

Wanda reflected that any chance devastation she had wrought to her hostess's feelings had been repaid in sorts, and more than repaid; but she swiftly reflected also that she was a voluntary guest, and with a design requiring philosophy to boot with skill; and further, that a battle got under way without declaration of purpose was part way to loss already, and that unless she seized this moment for attack her moments would be few, and no more than sufficient to retire with grace upon some ignominious lie that would save both herself and her Caballero Clark, and withal no loot to lull it.

Therefore with a swift batter of words upon the unwary enemy, engaging, colourful, of trenchant phrases and vivid side-lights upon its extreme spiritual import to her, she unfolded her errand, its practical phases to comprise, on the one side, her taking away of the parakeets; on the other, her leaving with the countess something in their place; anything, that was, except the vulgar product money, which of course she knew could not procure such

parakeets, unless, indeed, in sheer graciousness the countess would stoop to the seeming of such vulgarity to the extent of something she might, on sheer principle, have done herself without this winter, instance a new piano, or a motor car; but more likely, as Madame de l'Etoile scarcely expected any such whimsical chivalry of friendship from the countess to a stranger, some jewel of Madame's, except, of course, such as might be very significant and personal gifts, any of her jewels at all, of which she had worn many, as many as the hour, taste, and her gown had allowed, while there were many more upstairs.

The countess gazed at her—stared. And for an endless-seeming time that stare was all she did, and all she seemed to be. Nor was it a rude, or haughty, or even angry stare. In all its expanse of enamel-pink and expansion of Daisy-blue Peerage eyes its only element was astonishment; astonishment that left no room for any other emotion, until, through some sudden mental occurrence, one more quality entered it—anxiety, that grew to alarm, and that Madame de l'Etoile could not at once understand, but that alarmed her, in turn, but not soon enough, so that quite suddenly and with no preventive, a disconcerting thing happened.

Without one sound, the countess fell not backward, but forward, and rolled face first downward, and then upward, on the floor.

Madame de l'Etoile remained for one moment frozen at the abrupt débâcle effect of her morning's campaign, her thoughts leaping naturally to Mr. Clark, discarding him for this kind of emergency and leaping on to Elise, whom she knew to be undeniably excellent for sick people after Elise had made them sick, and then, as it was not Elise who had made the countess sick, on again by association of ideas to the fallen peeress's own starched maid, the logical first aid now; and she sped gazelle-like in that aid's direction.

Together they bestowed the golden head on a hand-

painted pillow, and together undertook further ministrations, some from bottles, Wanda guilefully omitting any mention of cause of disaster, and skilfully filling her share of the conversation with exclamatory sorrow for its occurrence, and on her part Margot—her new comrade's name—the while she sponged her mistress as busily soothed their visitor, assuring her that this had been known to happen, though in her own experience, to be sure, only once before, and that upon Madame la Comtesse's receipt of the news of Ladislav's marriage. And despite their sad occupation, Wanda could not help noting how further reminiscent of Elise this Margot was, for whereas Elise was so monosyllabic and Margot so pre-eminently the reverse, the diction of this Margot, written down, would have served Elise with a worthy successor to "A Modest Passion."

Ladislav, it seemed, was the Count, Madame la Comtesse's son, in the Consular Service of his country, with a history of notable appointments including Madrid, until his marriage, when, or scandalously shortly after when, he had been sent to batten on the moors (Margot evidently assumed they were Moors) of Guatemala, and kindred districts—from some one of which the parakeets had been sent to the countess, a tender but a tactless present, pointing out as it did some jungular and noisesome neighbourhood to the countess's already over-sensitive vision, which however had but made the parakeets the dearer to the sweet, pure, maternal countess. Wonderful, ever wonderful to Margot the fruits and fair flowers of maternal love. As for Ladislav, he, a splendid diplomat, had yet been slow to learn the statute of his personal limitations, and on the presumptive strength of his title had over-shot for an American fortune, starting with Mathilde Morris, and when she would none of him, taking, foolish-virgin-wise, an interval at the joys of bachelorhood again before trying for Marjorie Temple, who at the period when he tried for Mathilde, would unquestionably have seized gladly upon him, and so on and so on, always just a

rung too high for his contemporary age and novelty, until, when he was finally actually pushed in the face by Jasmine Nussbaum of Los Angeles, he had reverted to Paris and fallen upon evil days and worse nights in the form of one Fifi, of the Moulin Rouge. Not that Ladislav was a dis-solute count—quite the contrary; so that even so, in Margot's opinion, all might have yet been well, but for his very act of honourably marrying Fifi; for it was his carrying Fifi about with him as a countess that had got him hastened from Madrid to Guatemala; while as for the *real* countess, although, pure, lovely lady as she was, she has disapproved of Fifi from the start, it was only upon learning of the holy wedlock that she had passed into a swoon, and—Margot thus reassured Madame de l'Etoile once more as to the present misfortune—not so quietly, that other time, either, but after a scream that pierced the Great White Throne of Heaven. Quite likely this present less important swoon, Margot thought, considering the polite silence of it all and all, had come from Madame de l'Etoile having reminded her in some way of Fifi.

Unflattering as this theory, quite unintentionally, might be, the correct one, which Wanda after her first disconcertion had grasped swiftly and fully, was in a way even more so—namely, the countess's conviction that she was a dangerous lunatic. It was not the first time, of course, that Madame de l'Etoile had been mistaken for a maniac; but the previous occasion she had purposely gone to, as a matter of expediency, while this one appeared as a likely ruin of her object. Still, her divination at least mapped in advance her course of behaviour when the countess should revive, and the lady's unconsciousness meantime had led to helpful knowledge of her history; and as if the chances of active battle were indeed shaping in Wanda the Adventuress's favour, Margot had just nicely completed serving up her delicious dish of dirt when the royalty sat bolt upright, as suddenly and as straight of back as if she never had collapsed supine in

Morpheus's embrace, except that she was sitting on the floor instead of on the chair.

Mentally, she was as yet less stable. Her memories of recent events were kaleidoscopic. And discerning this, Wanda swept ahead of Margot into the breach, lifted her, soothed and smelling-bottled her so gracefully and tenderly as to eradicate all perturbing signs in herself of dangerous mania, and even as she groped for a safe subject of re-entering talk, the very happiest of chances fell from Margot, who if she did not read the newspapers anyhow looked at the pictures, and who now paid back Wanda for her own maid's cup of newspaper poison last night by innocently letting fall a reference to the lovely guest being an opera singer.

And at this a second change, abrupt and revolutionizing as the swoon had been, came over the countess. The parakeets were forgotten. So was Margot, who chastely withdrew. And illuminant as had been the *genre* tableau of the night before, a swift flashing life-history was disclosed to Wanda—a long, briefly told, only half-consciously betrayed pathetic history of a woman who could have sung . . . save that . . . who had wanted to sing . . . save that. . . . No wonder, thought Madame de l'Etoile, as from almost no words whatever she saw and understood it all, no wonder the memory-spirit of a prima donna had aured that fat little body as it sputtered its dulcet anger in the lobby. And as she felt, from a little contraction in her throat, the first warning of tears, she staved them away by asking the countess if she would like to have her sing a little—right now.

The Countess d'Orancy would; and Wanda swiftly went to the piano, strolled her fingers over it for a hint of its *timbre*, and then let her voice into "The Girls of Cadiz," the first thing she always thought of for special or emergency occasions. There were a little startlement of the Normandy room at the measure of the golden voice, a little startlement of the long-disused old instrument; but presently all was atune; presently after, she had

slipped by similar instinct, and without interim, into Debussy's "*Mandoline*" . . . a brief heaven—to Wanda, anyway, always—at whose end she glanced over her shoulder with some question as to a choice, only to question and to look no more, for sight of that little bolt-up weeping countess, gazing and weeping, weeping and gazing, simply could not be borne, and music too. And she stuck to music.

She sang for an hour; *Traviata*—so soon again, when she had thought, and planned, it should be long before again; Juliette—her waltz; Caro Nome; rambling, a very Spaniard, unconscious though so intentional, wandering, stopping at any shop-window of song, hither and yon, anything; everything; and forgetful of everything, except what she was doing, and her love of doing it.

And at the end of the hour, the countess sent her home.

She knew something about singing, this Countess Paulownia; and the remark that Margot had dropped had been something about Madame de l'Etoile having sung at the Opéra the night before.

"Because, you see, you will be coming again soon, my dear, will you not?" she explained as she lifted her tear-swollen face for Wanda to kiss good-bye. "You have promised me that, haven't you?"

Wanda promised again; and searching her eyes, and assured of it, the little up-gazing countess fetched something from behind her straight up-and-down little back. It was the cage of birds who could not sing.

In the corridor, through a long moment exactly as before she passed the door inward-bound, Wanda stood collective—collective in an almost guilty sense, in one great particular—and again with a vision of the countess to dispel, but so very different a one: fully clothed, in absurdly large-scaled plaid, and of piteous, tear-washed enamel. But except for the moment, when she needed it entirely away from her spirits, she wanted to dispel it—and she would—very, very gradually, and through many hours of that coming Paris sprangtime. When those

birds in their exquisite conical cottage had appeared from behind that Scotch plaid back, she had had an instant's violent reaction, a desire to hurl her crest of battle-tide in spray to the four winds; but she remembered that she had had a delicately yet deeply esoteric purpose in her design, a purpose with a motive of deep love in it, a spiritual impulsion that carried its chivalric whimsicality into the profound, to the exact measurement that it had carried herself to the heights; and sheer justice itself urged upon this that she now could pay for the birds as nothing her barter had proffered could have done—no jewel of hers, or number of jewels; while there were plenty of motor cars left in the world, if her own failed, which it certainly would not do, to serve for that same *Printemps de Paris*, while that old piano, with its spinet-like voice, would serve well enough too—with her own voice added to it! . . .

Therefore with the completion of her whirling cycle of thoughts and her eyes ashine with the happy triumph of her first mission-labour of this wonderful day, she proceeded loot-wreathed to the lift, wherein, however, she said "Down!" instead of her intended "Up!", because Daisy, least of all in her thoughts thus far of the morning though safely docketed in their background against mishap, had suddenly come forward in them as near at hand, there would be no time for procrastinate discussions of outer emporiums, so that their luncheon of reunited state must be here, and luncheon at the Normandy, for such an occasion, would need garnishing. Snails, for instance. . . . Quite wonderful in their eventual results, if properly directed. . . . (In one great love, very great if not ennobling, Madame de l'Etoile and the princess were akin.) And she re-emerged in the lobby, birdcage, birds and all, and unconsciously ecstatic, swam across it, like a cinema-trick of last night's picture run backward—from lift to desk instead of desk to lift, diffusive rapture in place of tabloid rage, in truth a Ravisher—marvellous etymology of Paulownia!—especially to any amongst the

onlookers who had onlooked last night, and of whom at least there was one, and the only one who had fully dis-enjoyed last night's film.

Wanda breathlessly accosted him.

"I am successful, Mr. Clark! I nearly sent for you, but there was her maid! You did not know, of course, but these are what I went for, and I have them! I can never thank you! You must see some of my *public* performances—but indeed, I very, very much fear you would even more have enjoyed this one! When I proposed it, she fell facewards on the floor!"

"Mr. Clark" almost fell facewards on her neck, but he saved himself—and her—by dint of business-training and an apparent listening with all this ardour to her instructions for luncheon, which in automatically reverting to him afterward gave him some awful moments of doubt as to his own sanity as snails crawled over his brain; and Wanda, still shining-eyed, still breathless, and her thoughts forwarding, while her left-over impulsion from last night should serve, to the next portentous move, truly a vast one in concept, of her vivid day, vanished like a seraph upward, *vaporosoed* and bird-surrounded, to beard Elise.

En route, it occurred to her that anent her spoils of war there would be a very octave of emotional moments for Elise—first a moment *musical d'extase au clair de lune*, when she learned that these illgotten gains were indeed Wanda's property and brought home as such, and then, as soon afterward as Wanda dared—and Wanda dared virtually anything to-day—a moment of ineffable hell when she (Elise) found out that the parakeets were not to live with them, and moreover, hell ghastlier yet, that she (Elise) was herself to enact the gruesome rôle of their conveyor elsewhere.

This last seemed quite a shame, even to this unscrupulous adventuress de l'Etoile, as she had learned, that unhappy *Aïda* afternoon, of the psychology of the cuckoo clock. And had Daisy been the designed beneficiary of

these parakeets she certainly would not have chosen Elise for the errand—not after promising Daisy last night to give her the best of her friendship and not its whimsicality. It simply so happened that the deposit of those epoch-making birds just where she felt they should rest in her history, and the drawing of a long, repletely happy breath upon the knowledge of it, required a journey some yards out of France, and comprised an errand of so fragile texture that she knew of no one to entrust it safely and comfortably to outside her own self, unless Elise—Elise with that profound inner self which she knew to be as accurate as the devil, and just the right spirit for this purpose of angelic metal, while Wanda, quite aside from not wishing to conduct the thing in person, had very double duties here in Paris—duties at the Opéra; duties, now, with the Peerage, that the parakeets, in the first place, be properly paid for. Besides, so far as any torturing of Elise was concerned by the necessities, the whole design but led forward in thought to something of far greater importance to Elise.

Madame de l'Etoile longed to be alone—was longing for it almost as she never had longed. She wanted—with the full two English flavours of the word she both needed and desired—the psychology of solitude. Literal aloneness, instance dressing herself, even at the Opéra if necessary, would constitute a great percentage of such psychology; while the sending of Elise upon an errand of dimensions would be but an appropriate opening number of the Elise programme she had inspirationally patterned. As anybody else's maid, Elise was simply unimaginable (especially as the impediment was one's own fault). Elise was pretty. Elise, endowed, or less cultivatedly put, with somebody else's wheels greased, would not have to be anybody else's maid. *Somebody's*, if anybody's, and not long at that, needing only a church or so. And thereby, warned Madame de l'Etoile's thoughts in one of their racing contacts with English, hung a dangerous question of the morale of words. . . .

But rapidly as ran her thoughts to-day, the lift had not been entirely idle, either, and she was facing her own door—and the first of those prophesied moments.

There it was, that moment, inside, as if expecting her, and she had not overprophesied, for so was the moonlight there, and not from the rue de l'Echelle, either, nor from the Place Royale, but from Elise, as should have been, *l'extase* and all, the *clair* streaming from her not in great vulgar spikes, as from the sun, but in great oblong beams, as from the *lune*, and in which sat Watteau and Boucher and Fragonard painting fans, whilst, amidst, Elise appeared as Rachel, Lecouvreur, Bernhardt and Duse in their rarest rôle, that of the cuckoo of Paradise clock, darting in and out of herself over Madame de l'Etoile's, *née* the Comtesse d'Orancy's parakeets.

When sunlight had been restored, and the parakeets hung in it, and their luncheon been prepared, and Wanda prepared for hers, this comprising a redisposal of jewelry and a slight softening of hair, and the two of them, she and Elise, against the imminent Daisy hour of one, having got to a rather pretty task, that of composing a nosegay for Daisy out of last night's bouquets (Elise, so consistently consonant with people who do not like people, being so rather sweet and nice about flowers too), Wanda, stems in hand and piles of fallen blooms around her, came at that same planned bearding of Elise—and not without recurrent thought, considering her chosen subject, of the hidden dangers of the fascinating English tongue.

The thing that between them they were planning for Daisy—somehow Wanda took a gladness from thinking Daisy also, who had not been there, would yet share partially in that wonderful last night—was a quite lovely thing, some of the orchids having lasted so, despite their tossing, and the great rare camellias proffering flawless instances, and it was with their four hands doing together a moderate-sized miracle of tasteful loveliness with a big

beautiful hunk of brocade ribbon, that Wanda popped her all vital question to Elise.

She did it in fairly straightway fashion, and without special danger on that account, Elise knowing her oral methods so well, and she so well knowing Elise's laconic mentality. It was merely the size and nature of this particular subject, with its avenues for inference and ramification, that had given her as much pause as it had, and that gave her as much circumlocution as it did.

"Elise," she said, "I earn my living, and so do you. I am an opera singer, and you are not. One must consider the future. Mine is cared for, with a little over. Otherwise, such matters are serious. Elise, have you ever thought of marrying?"

"Yes, Madame. I was married yesterday," said Elise.

Madame de l'Etoile was, in truth, not a "sheister philosopher." She did not, upon receipt of this matrimonial news, give a scream that would have pierced the Great White Throne of Heaven. Her wisdom-seeking had been of a genuine kind that had taught her the capability, as well as the value, of silence upon certain very great surprises, and instead of thus shaking the Lord and the Normandy to their foundations, she went on tying the beautiful brocade bow on the Princess Daisy's nosegay with an outward calm of such duration that Elise's marriage seemed to have passed over with the quietness of an angel or a *liaison*, until she said:

"As soon as my so important engagements get over with, we must discuss an agreeable wedding-gift for you, Elise. Meantime, you might think up some points about your husband that would be helpful to mention."

"Yes, Madame," said Elise.

"But," continued Madame, quite as if buoyed onward by this excellent answer, "one thing we might settle at once, for it is something I had already planned for you, and it fortunately seems to fit even better as things are. I want you, Elise, to take a trip into Spain for me, to—to carry those parakeets where they really belong, which is

a little town in the Pyrenean foothills some journey out of Barcelona. It is very important to some of my personal feelings that they should safely go there, to a friend who was once my hostess long ago, and with a discreet, quite discreet, message of my love and welfare to her, and to the priest of the town. I know you will remember all this, though I will repeat it leisurely. But I would like the main of it from my mind now—that this pretty friend of mine, whose little trained birds you will enjoy, Elise, is to know I have not forgotten my love to her, and that it is shown in these birds which meant much to me in a great moment of my life that she would have understood and sympathized with. Her very name, by the way, is ‘Sympathetic One.’ And to do this rightly for me, I have no—no friend, Elise, but you—none to be so trusted as you with such birds, not to mention some money in form of jewels that I will send to the padre for his church purposes. Naturally, with the Opéra I cannot spare myself to such a trip.’ And now it would greatly please me in addition, to think it would comprise a pretty wedding-journey for you and your husband. I suppose we may consider so much ‘settled,’ Elise?”

“We were going to the Lake of Como, Madame, but I will ask my husband,” said Elise.

Philosophic calm was but briefly needed here, for the telephone announced Daisy—happily, for snails, despite their reputation, must not be kept waiting, and Daisy was already late; not by intention, truly, on this important occasion, but because she had come by the rue de la Paix, that glittering monster so conveniently situated to corrupt such persons of weak character as happen to live at the Richelieu and call upon friends at the Normandy.

And Wanda hastened down to find her at the desk, with a large burden of foolish presents piled on it for her, all of which could be, it seemed (and would be), exchanged—a harbinger of a spring busy with talk, journeys and ramifications; and with these and the glorious

nosegay and a volume of greetings exchanged, they proceeded gorgeously weighted to the luncheon-room, Wanda not forgetting to leave over her shoulder a climactically head-spinning smile for Mr. Clark, who stood gazing dazedly after this miracle-woman who was one minute bedecked with bunches of feathers plucked living and by force from countesses, and the next with orchids and camellias that she hung on princesses, before sallying onward to eat snails! He had hoped doubtfully, bewilderedly, that the snails were to be for the parakeets. But no. She was not wearing them for lunch. Perhaps she had eaten *them*. And what had she done to her hair? Why was she several times as beautiful each time she appeared? And he gave a customer about a hundred pounds' worth of rooms for a hundred francs.

Perhaps just the day itself, continuance of the night, was doing that deed of climbing beauty in Wanda; making all the golden hay it could out of her before weariness could set in; for even the luncheon had its added wine-glass—and literally, for it comprised the happy accident that the Countess d'Orancy happened to be lunching thus publicly this morning, too, and with one fell swoop of mood Madame de l'Etoile waved clattering aside not only Peerage stately etiquette but all Daisy-dangers of female *contretemps*, and plunged the two titles together. A great running of *garçons*, forth and back and to and fro, took place. The countess, too, loved snails. And too, the princess and the countess loved each other. Mood! . . . Faith can move mountains. . . . Mood, put in practice, might move chewing-gun. . . .

And returned, and alone, to Elise again, just rightly before four with a neat margin for achieving a street-gown, one further piece of news worked rightly with Wanda for her day.

"My husband will be very pleased to go to Spain, Madame," said Elise.

"Thanks, Elise," said Wanda.

And somewhat later, as the out-of-doors costume

neared its soft little hat, Elise, ordained to help the day along toward unquity, spoke again, and thus soon after a most indefinite appointment to do so.

"I can think of nothing of importance to tell you about my husband, Madame—except that he has a very fine position."

"Ah?" said Wanda, genuinely glad. "And—and what kind of position, Elise?"

"I meant social position, Madame," said Elise.

"You—you will wish, Elise," said Wanda after a moment's pause, and herself wishing to reach some satisfied balance in the circumstances, "now that you are—are *his* maid—if you still are—instead of still mine, to be making your plans for your home, and so on. And I hope it will be at some convenient world-centre where I might reach you in some sudden need of mine. You see, I will have no maid at all for a period—for it will probably be a long time before I come across anyone exactly like you."

"My husband will decide where we shall live when we return from Spain, Madame," said Elise.

Again the telephone, this time precise with the hour as if it had been a cuckoo, saved Wanda from thoughts of profound philosophy, and plunged her to profounder, in whose extremes she was fully at home; and again the lobby and a conspicuous friend claimed her—again the desk, indeed, for it was here that the mixed perfumes of cigarettes and Lovers' Kisses Soap would have guided her even if she had been blinded by the accompanying glare of diamonds. The centre and purveyor of the fragrance and dazzle was conversing and sharing his Manila *cigarillos* with Mr. Clark, who, fortunately off duty at four o'clock sharp, was inhaling as deeply as he, marvelling, and being relaxedly fortified by the heavy narcotic for one more, for to-day a final, vision of the wonder-woman. Yes; changed again, and instead of just several times more beautiful, a hundred times, with those suave touches of fur, a hundred times more

devastating, not with the smile, which he was nervously prepared for, but with her articulation of "darling" (*Darling!*) to this—*this!*—visitor. Visitor? Brigand? Pirate? Martian? When he awoke, they were gone. . . .

They were gone into an awaiting vehicle, and one moreover that was not a horseless-carriage, forceful, modern, space-annihilating, but one horseful and forceless, dawdling, old-Parisian; and she leant back as if she were driving through the Ramblas at home in Spain, quiet at his side, quite wordless, and quaffing strength, in this first moment of inevitable tiredness, from this understanding presence of her prospective confessor. "Somewhere gay" was what she had last night directed him, and she wondered, now a little fearfully, whereto indeed he was taking her. And soon, almost with a little choke for her at this fresh lesson against fear of any kind where there is love, and in iteration of the constant wonder of this being's divination, she found themselves, after a clumping jog through the dear Gauche of old Paris, in a desertedly quiet little restaurant near the Luxembourg; in the Quartier; not quite of it. And without consulting her, of the one stork-like waiter in sight he ordered, in an Esperanto-polyglot pronunciation that was planets away from French, but a voice that not the Frenchest of waiters upon foreigners would have dared to pretend to misunderstand,

"Ab-sin-ty!"

Through the life-and-mood-giving pearl seep of it through her body, thoughts, easier and easier thoughts, came to her for her confessional; but preventive of all their initial articulate need came from him as the jog-trot vehicle and the restorative absinthe had come, in one sudden, commanding demand from him across the table in the instant when he found her revivant eyes rightly ashine:

"Tell you me this instantly: *Is all this because you marry him, or because you do not?*"

Never before had Arnold, in such a light, been spoken

between them, and with tears in the brightened eyes, happy tears at the ease of it all now, she looked fully at him and said simply:

"Darling, it is because I do not."

And even after what soul-reading had just been shown, even she, for all her own soul-reading of him, was startled by the joy-cry that leapt from him.

"Then you are yourself again!" was the cry. "Once more, you are de l'Etoile, *the, my* de l'Etoile!"

"So," she choked, whisperingly, "you knew so well, as well as *that*—knew better than I!"

And with gradually joy-steadied voice Confession grew like a rich flower of the sun out of the choking whisper—and Absolution, pure as only a passion flower can be pure, from the guttural words of his satisfaction, once he knew that the Little Red Books were to be themselves again, that his star was not to be dragged from its orbit by any mere world.

Much as she had known of taking and of gift, from people, and peoples, and to them, nothing in her life had equalled, or approximated, in giving, in comprehension, in selflessness, this, since that Cadiz day, since that thing of Sacrament to which Sacrament now returned, reordained her . . . since Isabel.

"Understanding . . . what a thing it is! Understanding . . . what a thing, what a word!" she said over and over to herself; and aloud: "All I need, now, after your telling me, *confirming* me, darling, that I had been wrong, that now I am right, is a word—no, a name; a name for the place—the space—that was wrong in the Gran Via, now that I have passed it. I had a flash of it—flashes—last night. I promised myself I would track it to its hiding-place to-day. And what with parakeets, and Elise, and titled persons, I have failed as yet!"

And her eyes had taken on, though so happily, so almost peacefully, their seeking look.

"Whimsie!" he cried, dictatorially. "Word? Name? Nothing else but whimsie! You do not need any word!"

You do not need any name, except de l'Etoile! It is enough that this business of paint is over with! Paint, paint! It was not *you*, it was your *life* you were allowing to be painted!"

And this time, it was from her that a startling cry came.

"I have it!" her cry was. "Your words, upon a word and thoughts of mine last night, have brought it to me! Sophistication. . . . Quicksand. . . . Desert. . . . Make-up and paint. . . . Yes, that part of my life and all that it meant, the worldliness, the easiness, yes, and emptiness, all of the comfort and none of the *pain* of Art . . . are named for me now, and for my Great Way, forever. And strangely, there is such a place, with just that name, in America, where so much of it grew toward over-coming me. . . . Yes, all of real life I was bringing to the Opera, putting into my voice, my acting, my stage portraits, and all the paint, all the canvas and emptiness of the Opera's great stages, I was turning into my life. So that that life, though I did not know it, was all a desert, and a painted one! Darling, that part of my Gran Via was the Painted Desert!"

"And the *next* part," he said, prompt, advantage-taking, "is—*London*."

"Ah!" And with the instinctive exclamation, hand-outward a little forefending gesture escaped her—even in her glow, even in the wonder of the day's flawless conduct of her renaissance.

Undeviating, he ignored it with calm assumption, with, too, a certain suspicious demand:

"What will you sing there?"

A certain mist came into her eyes, but it was a peaceful mist, not a groping one.

"I do not know. What does it matter?"

"It matters only torment, that you could end at once! Whimsie! But I will allow you whimsie, only knowing that you go. You go to London?"

"Yes, I go to London."

"Ah!" And again, his this time, the word was instinctive, again his voice had been a guttural cry; and prepared for her, prepared like Nemesis, he drew a big thick folded paper from his pocket, along with a bigger, a thicker pen, a fountain-pen, a pen so childishly large that it looked as if it had been made by man, as God made the camel, to cross successfully and come triumphantly out of any desert in the world.

But she was young in her wonderful renaissance, indeed, less than twenty-four hours old in it, as yet, and from such actuality as this she shrank back.

"Ah, darling," she cried, "that, I cannot, no, must not, do to-day! Not to-day! Let me feel myself, let me know, a little more strongly first! I promise, yes, I promise, that I will go. But when? Possibly *then*, according that paper. But even for that, there are some weeks' time yet! Give me a little, long free breath of Paris springtime!"

He gazed at her a moment; then, as of old days—four-hundred-year-old days—he said:

"I can trust you."

"Yes," she answered, "you can *now* trust me, darling, fully. Fully, now that I have left behind me—forever—that Painted Desert!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

PASEAR

ELISE left for Spain, and the Pyrenean foothills; left from the Quai d'Orsay, on a pretty day, golden, flowery, that seemed to say, "*Printemps de Paris!*" . . . left surrounded by well-wishers, luxuries, luggage. Parakeets. Presents. *Printemps de Paris*. Wanda was there. Daisy was there. The Countess d'Orancy was there. Arnold was there. Mary Rutgers, and Margot, and Mary Rutgers's *fiancé* were there. Mr. Clark was not there. He saw them leave—leave the hotel. And all the rest saw Elise leave—leave for Spain. *Printemps de Paris*. Daisy gave her a great many of the presents. One of the presents was a clock. It could not tell the time, but it could yell. It had a pink magpie in it. Daisy nearly kept it. Daisy cried, when Elise left for Spain. *Printemps de Paris*. And, oh—Madame de l'Etoile afterward remembered—Elise's husband left for Spain, and the Pyrenean foothills. If Elise had not been bearded, she had anyhow been moustached—and waxed; yes, Madame de l'Etoile was quite sure she had seen a waxed moustache somewhere, through the bars of a birdcage. *Printemps de Paris*.

With this festooned episode at the Quai d'Orsay, the longed-for psychology of solitude was officially instituted for Madame de l'Etoile, and her Paris Springtime proved itself a succession of golden days, silvery nights, for which she sought, and swiftly found, a convenient and pretty christening-term, and one again that if not deep-dyed of actual churchly hue, was of religio-æsthetic tints: she called this time of her richer and richer glowing renaiss-

sance her "Miracle of Jewels"; with Faith that its spring-tide growths and discoveries would prove beautiful stones, at least some of them gems, and all of them precious; and with Faith replying to her.

One gem indeed came gradually there into place in the golden day-links, for it was painted truly, surely as if carven—her portrait, Arnold's portrait, of her great Wayward One, now his; and afterward, the great world's, as hers already was, and more lasting, materially, than hers, for as his portrait of her as a Lady hangs in the Metropolitan, this hangs in the Luxembourg, patiently waiting, or else impatiently, however may be with an inanimate thing as living and as seemingly full of soul as this, for Arnold's death, and the moment, ten years after that sad incident, when it can go to live more fully in the Louvre. But of purer gem colour to Wanda than such future likelihoods, was the gradual painting out from his handsome face a certain look that had lived there since her great wayward night . . . and the equally subtle, quite unconscious painting in of a less sorrowful, a contented, yes, even a happier tint. . . . Printemps de Paris! . . .

She saw much of Daisy. A delightful "*mucho*"; for, as the little princess's erstwhile pique had led her flouncingly to take out a lease of that Richelieu royal suite—seemingly for miniature royalty and a place perfectly appropriate for Daisy or ivory chessfolk to dwell in—Wanda was neither "domesticked" nor "domestuck" with her. And the rue de la Paix's monstrous demands upon them were a sort of pleasant stimulant-narcotic to Wanda instead of an exhaustive.

But most of all perhaps, and anyway with greatest tenderness, her hours other than those of her studies and the Opéra went to Paulownia: Countess no more, Paulownia now only in part—specifically, Paula. *She* knew what that tree was like, if Wanda did not, and would not be known by it, even in the spring, except in legal documents. Rotund, enamelled little Paula, then. Drives

and music, music, motor-drives and music; and this bit of the botany, scarcely thought of as Peerage Department now, grew tight like a morning-glory around the diva's heartstrings. There was an ample space of such strings for a vine-flower of propinquity to climb upon and curl around, so aptly after the close, brief nearness of Doña Rina—green, a bit sadly green in her Paris Springtime thoughts, right as it all was, that little story, rightly as it all must eventuate, only pensive, not quite unhappy, even now, as the loved heroine of it, so far away, bravely climbed her *own* ladder, and so doing, was paid by life in the very fact of her paying *it*. But it was well, it was a glad thing, to have warmth near-by too, right here in the little Street of the Ladder itself. And somehow, it was largely aside from the parakeets and their spiritual obligation that Wanda's affection grew so sturdy; somehow, it was around thoughts, ever current and recurrent thoughts, of Ladislav, and the Heaven's-Throne-rending little tale of that son which so piteously haloed her sweet, lonely little Paula. How was it the young—and especially the middle-aged young!—so disregarded the old, and most especially, the old and fat? Was that simply *life*—thus showing life to be nothing else but death? . . . She could not find it in her to blame Fifi overmuch. She remembered that herself had been an *artista*. . . . And the thought led her on to think, too, of herself in relation to the old—to parents—and of what had been said to her of that in the dancing streets, the old dancing streets, of old Sevilla. . . .

But such thoughts, though of such indeed are rosaries and renaissances made, she would not greatly allow herself, and for the right colouring of her springtime jewel-string (and "rosary" she let herself call it now, instead of mere "miracle," as a present for herself, to pay back for that one sad thought) she gave herself, withal her pensiveness of peaceful philosophy, to things of gaiety—parties even. Parties of Arnold, and Daisy, and Paula, and Mary Rutgers, and Mary's *fiancé* (marvelling par-

ticularly at how the princess and the countess continued to love each other! Or rather, at the princess's continuing love of the countess. Could *titles* have to do with love? Alas, the mere little "Doña" had been a large precipitant of the reverse "catastroaf" in Nueva York!). So that on her great—and indeed growingly greater—Opéra nights, Wanda's whole Botany-Peerage would bloom in one box together as if on the window-sill of a king's tenement, for all the world to see . . . a large, lovable dot in itself on the furthering miracle-string of that rosary of jewels.

And in herself a rose, by hint of texture and by virile sweetness, Mary Rutgers proved, and it was that impression that Wanda secured, and lastingly held, as to the whole of Mary and of Mary's placidly pretty love-match; and exclusively, for distinct portraiture of its hero Wanda somehow did not memorably achieve. A handsome young man, as heroes go, and ought to go. A type. Yes, that was it, a type, for though he was not English, he would suggest to her, at the festivities at which they mingled, the desk clerk of the hotel—and then stop, abruptly stop, suggesting further, so that Wanda, in her chance after-thoughts of him away from him, could never rightly diffuse him from "Mr. Clark," although one was very brune and the other very blond. But which? And which one's collar was it that did not go the same way? So that indeed, driving with Paula in the Bois she bowed to Mr. Clark so very deeply one afternoon that Paula by reflex action bowed quite deeply too, and Mr. Clark, thus put upon by Fate, spent a sleepless night on Wanda's account thereafter, while Wanda spent an equally sleepless night on his, deciding and redeciding whether it were ethically and duly right for her to hint to Arnold that she had caught Mary's fiancé in the Bois du Boulogne with a lovely *ingénue* who was not Mary; and with pitiless daylight felt indeed she must, despite her own conscience-stricken past life, until Paula said to her, after some hesitation, at breakfast:

"You look tired, dear, as if you hadn't slept well, so I specially oughtn't to say anything un-good-looking. But, dear, *I* have had a *perfectly* sleepless night, and it's best sooner than later to tell you why. And with all your kind-hearted notions about comradeship, and Spanish democracy, and so on, I really feel, sweetheart, that you shouldn't have bowed quite so elaborately to that saucy desk clerk in the Bois yesterday. Here in the hotel, darling, it is none of my affair how much you break his heart. That is one of the casualties of his unhappy business position, and he must go through it. But it's literally unscrupulous of you, Wanda darling, to dazzle him blind in the street, and wouldn't be a bit like you if you stopped to think."

Wanda did stop to think, tea-cup in air, and after a long moment of dazed silence, said:

"Yes. You are quite right. That was a *great* mistake of mine in the Bois. I must be much more cautious!"

Thus the nights passed—not sleepless all of them, happily . . . and the days—happily sleepless all of them, with the early-birding of this Paula and that Wanda, with their positively parakeet love of sunshine . . . for the song-bird, in happy trivialities, and in one great significance: the growth as on truly a sparkling rosary-string of her Miracle of Jewels.

And then, not with a trumpet-cry at dawn, but casually in manner, as even the richest days will do, came a day that was the jewel-day of all, one that in its garnering for her of pure stones might well form the happy, un-Golgothæd symbol, if such could be on any rosary, to be the carven-gemmed pendant of the chain.

It was at a time when the swiftly sure portrait was assured, where accident short of death could but with difficulty injure its creation, and interruption be but of petty good or harm; and eager, unusually so because the day held no other plan of specialized enjoyment, she went

for her appointed time to Arnold's beautiful studio; and she did not sit that day.

Something withheld her from the actual threshold. Withheld her, guardian angel-like. It was voices; rather, one voice, it seemed, but one that certainly was not talking to itself, and moreover seemed not even quite itself—for it was dramatic, while it was Arnold's voice. Arno dramatic! . . . Thought of *contretemps*, in a feministic sense, would not have held her back, for that was beyond all thinking. Guardian angel, then; and as the door was welcomingly open, she listened. And Arnold's voice went on—went *dramatically* on; and there was a sob, a sob from another voice. A royal voice; a refined, a royal sob. Somehow, in the dramatic words which had caused it, there was something familiar, as if known before, but not *heard*. And suddenly, she knew; and knew, too, that Arnold had forgotten her appointment. This indeed was miracle, a jewel miracle. Arnold was doing something he had proffered to do—to do in her behalf—long ago: he was reading "Jacquot-Jacquette" aloud, aloud to a Little Princess. Yes, he was chewing away bit by bit, as she, thus aided, was swallowing whole, the last, the very last, of those Edenesque and history-making apples. Wanda knew that they were nearly gone; knew that quite presently, in a very few seconds more, there was a classical, a climactic sentence, a sentence epoch-suggesting in potentiality, probably as really great a sentence as any in the whole fifty chapters of "Les Pommes de Jacquot-Jacquette." That sentence was on the very last page, and that sentence was:

"Jacques! Jacquot! Jacquette! Jacquot-Jacquette!"

Printemps de Paris.

And Wanda fled; a quiet, a happy, heart-filled flight; fled to Paula, not to talk, but to express—to tell just "I am happy!"—that she was happy from the fullness of friendship that is not whimsical.

Through her brief journey back to the Normandy, her one thought of want, of want that seemed unlikely of

fulfilment, was of Paula herself, a longing that there might be some wonderful bit of happiness for little Paula that was not just a voice, or Bois-panoramæd motor-cars, or, as so selfishly to-day, a share of news of somebody else's happiness, such as her own this minute. And she almost wondered if she *ought*, as she longed, to burst in upon her with those words "I am happy!" and she was not allowed to, for though burst in she did, it was to an outburst from Paula:

"Oh, Wanda, Wanda, I'm so happy! Wanda, Fifi's dead! Fifi's dead! Oh, Wanda, Fifi's dead! Oh, Wanda, Wanda, Wanda!"

Fifi was dead, there was no doubt about that. For a voluminous letter was in Paula's hand, and largely in the air, waving; and any reflection in Wanda's mind of generalizing sadness that death, death to anyone in the world, and especially to any *artista*, could be, as it so legitimately could, a matter of complete, rapturous happiness to any soul as entirely sweet as the one glowing through its enamel before her, was wiped from thought by Paula's next volatile, staccato, breathless and breath-taking announcement:

"Ladislav of course has gone in mourning, and perhaps Central America has too—though I doubt it—but the Consulate hasn't, we can be sure of that, and I'm going out to buy a red dress to wear! I've never worn a red dress in my life and didn't suppose anything could ever induce me to, but I'm going to wear one down to dinner to-night, the reddest dress in Paris! And you must go with me, darling, for your eyes are better than mine, and we must be sure we pick out the brightest one! *Oh, Fifi's dead!*"

And she disappeared to dress in plaid for the parade after the funeral garment, and promptly appeared Margot, taking her place and neglecting her to her task, with a double excuse to partake of a double joy: the joy of even a glimpse of Madame de l'Etoile, who had enraptured her life by having her several times in her

dressing-room at the Opéra to "assist" at the miracle of toileting an actual opera-singer; and the joy of rehearsing to her this Central American sensation.

Fifi certainly was dead. She had died in agony, the most awful agony, following convulsions. The Wages of Sin had been paid like a great thunderbolt rolling from the blue floor of heaven. She had been bitten by a Gila-Monster. If aid does not come promptly after the Gila-Monster, there is no hope. God had meant it, for the Gila-Monster is not Central American and no precautions had been taken against one biting Fifi. And yet one had come all the way from the neighbourhood of the Rio Grande and bitten her. Bitten her all over. And when aid had come, she was screaming but could not speak, for she was having convulsions. She had convulsion after convulsion. And when she was dead, she had turned black, black from head to foot. That was how it was known to have been a Gila-Monster, although it had got away, and bitten no one else in Central America. So God had meant it, meant that Fifi should die, and turn black, black for people to see, as black outside as she had been within. Not to mention what a fix in which to be shown up before the Great White Throne. Fifi was dead. Printemps de Paris. Dead as a door-nail, and black from head to foot.

Indeed, Madame de l'Etoile was not sorry to turn, herself, from black to brightest red, in company with Paula. And forth they went, and bought a brighter red than any Wanda had ever seen outside an arena; and as fortunately it could not be got fixed for Paula's round figure to wear forthright out of the shop, so that she likely would set fire to only the inside of the hotel, Wanda proposed and put into effect a rambling journey, reminiscent tenderly of her meanderings from dresses to Beer-sheba with Doña Rina—glowingly rejoicing in her present friend's touching, strange big happiness, glowingly rejoicing in her own—starting down the Avenue de l'Opéra, and stopping indolently here and yon. A book-

store lured her. It was the shop where she and Doña Rina had discovered the *Valse Brune*—a music-shop she had then thought, a book-shop, and a famous one, she now knew. And within, something still new in gladness, wonderful gladness, was await for her. She had little love of the basic colour red . . . except in little books. And a little red book among new, imported springtime products, called here to her eyes and then her fingers. It was a fair little volume of reminiscence, essayesque, modestly personal. A transient-looking, casual little book. But her eyes widened, her heart bounded. "By Rina Rugg" it said. Almost, tears were in her eyes. And then, when she had turned a page, they *were* in her eyes, swiftly were on her cheeks. For, "To Wanda" it had further said. And that was all there was of dedication . . . so like Doña Rina; no hint of the past with a poignant name unknown to the world; no culling of the little prestige of the "de l'Etoile" that was so known to it. . . .

Paula did not ask why she was crying, but she told her; and into the sunshine of this wonderful day the two went forth again, each with a little red book . . . each with many little red books, as many as was wise and profitable to take away from the present supply, to show and to talk about to all the noteworthies they knew. . . .

They paused again near-to, for Wanda to send a cablegram to a distant friend whose happiness meant heart-overrunning happiness to herself . . . this jewelled day . . . a long, a spendthrift's cablegram, with several different times "darling Rina" in it. . . .

And then, again at Wanda's request, on they went across Paris, into the Cité, and down through the bridge, down, into the little Garden of the Gallant Green, and Wanda sat once more—and once more with a loved friend, too—between the silver streamers of the Seine divided by it, and under the accumulating lavender of the sunset. . . . Overhead, too, the giant corpuscles of the city life-blood glowed by in the bridging artery from hand to hand

of Paris . . . from the right hand to the left hand, from the left hand to the right. . . .

With the coming of real dusk, she dispatched Paula home, in a car that would hasten against that red robing for a Normandy dinner; and herself went afoot, leisurely, between the long wonderful lines of twinkling lights, up through the city, along that splendid great stretching continuance of the Boul "Miche," the Boulevard de Sébastopol, happily, anticipatively as she had gone that Seventh Day from Mont Juich round about through the Gran Via, and to a certainty, to-day, of the opposite of heartbreak; into the great circling boulevards where the Porte St. Martin and the Porte St. Denis neighbour them and each other, and along them, past the Bonne-Nouvelle, to the Poissonière, and thence Montmartreward, but not very far, for it was in a little narrow hotel in the bending rue Cadet that the Maestro dwelt and smoked.

And without need of miracle to accomplish it here, she went up unannounced, and threading her way by a certain heavy odour of Manila, reached his room, and knocked, and entered, and seated herself very quietly therein.

"Darling," she said, "I am here to tell you something, but first, I am going to ask you a question, which answer if you can. I wonder if you can? It is not for any special reason of the moment; and it is simply this: How is it that you understand me so deeply, minutely, and well; by what miracle-gift is it that you do?"

He looked at her gravely, his gold-brown eye-pools seeming very calm, and very deep; and there was but little pause before his answer.

"I know something of the sensitive temperament," he said, simply.

After a longer pause than his, and her own eyes deep with thoughtfulness, she said:

"Yes, you *would* answer very, very simply, and I suppose that that is what it is. Yes, what you have said tells all of the soul of it, though so little, so very little, of the *quantity*! . . . And now," she added, "perhaps I am

not, after all, going to tell you what I said I would, for what need? You see, what I am here for to-day, a day of miraculous jewels, is a thing rather to do, than to tell."

And with the golden-brown pools illuminated, but silent in his joy, he unfolded and placed the great thick paper, unscrewed and placed the greater, thicker pen, before her. And save for the scratching of this great pen, it was in a replete silence, a silence of happiness, full and daring happiness, that she at last signatured the portentous paper with the one great word:

de l'Etoile.

BOOK IV
THROUGH THE BAD VALLEY

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE NIGHT AND THE NIGHTINGALE

ENGLAND!

It was a written word, yet a word ejaculated, as if vocally, as if the flowing, reckless ink of it were a means to ecstasy as worthy, as easy, as articulation itself.

England!

Again with the black silence of night it noised itself abroad upon the white paper, with again large, free-handed letters despite the shocked marginal boundaries of a little red-leather-covered book; with again a great astonishment-mark, as if England were indeed a thing to be astonished at no matter what the cost of such wide-eyedness and open-mouthedness of handwriting.

England!

Despite the rare, lovely calm of the woman who wrote, the word was like a cry; despite the white-gowned figure emanating poise by its posture and deliberateness, and, against it, the blackness of the big word's texture, it was like a cry of thrilling joy.

It was interregnum—that strange hour from the Latin dictionary which seems to find its perfect gem-instances only in Britain—as if the insinuating forefinger of the North reached out purposefully from its spoke-like hand of metal-hard lights to touch and beautify the warm Gulf Stream's child Civilization, so recklessly indulged in on this spot.

To-day, this hour was the twilighted gem gradually fetching the night of Madame de l'Etoile's London *début*. The pure white diamonds of the Thames, upheld like queer stars above it, were, as if its steel-glittering movement were indeed too rapid, sluggish as it was, for the symbolical flour in it, flaring to yellowish crown-jewels along the Embankment. Ready to permeate the early summer night stood all the solidity, all the materialized mystery of London.

And though this beautified room had necessarily closed visually out the strolling parade of minutes of light and minutes of shadow doomedly passing each other, and turned itself brilliant with electricity, it must have but the more closed in the essence of the great metropolitan mood and splendour with this woman who could so express herself, and something more than herself, into the one repeated word that she wrote:

England!

Beautified this room truly was. It was a room not beautiful in itself, unless by dint of its ghosts, for it was a dressing-room in Covent Garden; lovable, perhaps, from a ghost of Minnie Hauk, or perhaps from a ghost of Schalchi; but suddenly now, with its loveliness of ghosts, which are creatures of but woodwork and memory, made beautiful too to gaze at, by the coming, with her accoutrements arbitrary and determined as the Gulf Stream's, of this breathing creature. As cheerfully and recklessly as the Gulf Stream had brought humanity to England, she had brought a caravan of art to Covent Garden.

Walling the back of the once naked spaciousness of the room drooped huge curtains of old blue colour, their brocaded heaviness hinting of tapestry, and in their wide, old-rose-tinted borders quite proving it. The rich rare things backgrounded a grand piano of sumptuously delicate lines, while two exquisite bouquets of dead colours answered each other across the place—two screens, pannelled, high, delicate, gilded-edged: one, closing away the

doorway to the room, composed of Fragonards, the other, shutting likewise from view her dressing-space, a rival miracle made of Watteaus; so that, through the room's glow of gay loveliness, across its rich stretch of French carpet, a carpet typically Parisian, black, a deep, a soft black sprinkled with yellow primroses for pattern, there was a constant *contretemps* in the very air—because, to the languid and marvellously mannered "L'Indifférent" of Watteau, were flung back the Fragonard "Happy Hazards of the Swing."

The three walls left to rival the rich old blue curtains did so with pictures too—fine copies, finely coloured, of masters older, perhaps, than even the curtains indeed. There were Murillos—the "Betrothal of Saint Catherine," of Cadiz, and the "Saint Francis of Padua"; and others, such as did not tell in some or other betraying way of the Peninsula, possessions of the next great temperamental love of their owner—Louvre-possession, here in duplicate, simple coloured prints to start with, then simply varnished, and afterward again varnished, until they had gained the very glow-look of oil, the very fragrance of Louvre colour.

On the desk, Dresden figurines were parading with its terra cotta ones, while into this mixed company had crept—as if for sympathy, it was so very small—a tiny hand-tinted copy, minutely framed in rich dull gold, as if indeed it were a very large picture, of Botticelli's "Spring."

Even a suggestion of purely social function joined in the miracle-makeshift of this richly blossoming room, for just at the back of the white-gowned figure at the desk was a diminutive circular table, lace-drenched, silver-glinting, feasible only for service of some theatrical guest, or else, if for its mistress really to dine before some ensuant rôle, undoubtedly for her to dine very much as Lilli Lehmann did to sing Isolde—on a drink of water and a bowlful of rice. While as undoubtedly this woman would have done so with all of the elegance, though certainly none of the cause, of the ennuied lady in the

Arabian Nights who ate her bowlful with marked grace of holden prong and one grain at a time, for appearances, because she went out (by implication against her husband's rules) quietly at night to eat corpses in the graveyard.

Nor were the bouquets of this room halted with either this luxury or luxury of pictures, for midway between the two rich spots where stood the screen of Fragonards—"La Cage," and "La Poursuite," and "Les Souvenirs," and ever, as if it intended to stop, or continue, right there for ever, that eternal "Les Hazards Heureux de l'Escarpolette," instead of going home to Hertford House, and the answering screen of Watteau—"The Indifferent One," and "A Masquerade," and "Perfect Harmony," and a wealthy bit of detail from "The Departure from Cytheria"—appeared nature herself—or her representative as in a visiting-card, for the piano was piled high with luxuriant examples of alive flowers, a soft Babel of perfumes, a lovely wealth of vivid colours. Not quite a riot, for they were carefully laid forth, as if for any after-moment's right selection from them; and not quite a mass, for their riches, gamuting from pansies through roses on and on to orchids, had not been allowed to stop from view an ornament conspicuously placed, before the flowers thought of coming there, upon that piano. It was a statuette, a pure and precious miniature of the "Victoire de Samothrace," not very small, not large; an arbitrary copy, of whitest marble, instead of the soft cream-colour of its great sponsor in the Louvre; the scarred triumph of its onrush unchecked by this startling, snowy classicism of version-colour, and her pedestal the battered hunk of ship that belonged to her, but here, ploughing this sea of flowers, metamorphosed to a battered hunk of exquisitely carven ebony.

Some copy of this winged, earthen and heavenly thing was always near this woman, if not feasibly a statuette, at the least some small plaster-cast, then, some picture, large or small; as if Superstition, unwilling to desert her,

had merely abandoned its old, dangerous morbid pseudo-religious forms and transcendentalized itself into a righteous, evolutionary thing for companionship with her.

If she had been a stenographer, a post-card photograph of it would have stood like a goddess on her machine and made her spell better than she did as a prima donna. As she was a prima donna, this next-door-to-priceless version of marble and ebony stood on her piano, and made her sing even more deliciously than she spoke or spelled.

And to-day, to-night, she partook even personally of the Victory, for she, too, was in classically white draperies, which from her sitting posture the more suggested its sweep in their white wake at the back of her across the ebony-coloured carpet with its sprinkled yellow primroses, there as if intentionally to respond to the little ebony ship's waving ocean of flowers on the piano.

It was a soft gown clinging finely, in long simple lines, about her, relieved in its snowy sheen only by a rope of heavy green jade beads that were purposefully as unlike as possible to beads that once—many times—she had worn, and that occasionally, in the absorption of her writing, she lifted with both hands and held a little measure of across her forehead, as if their coolness helped concentration of thought; for she was not, as yet, dressed for whatever rôle she was to sing to-night, save for her hair, which was elaborately prepared, piled high, in ornate mounting waves, as if for a meticulous period of manners. Her face also was deliberately white, the lips brilliantly carmined, in that daring combination which she could so paramously employ for her own delight as a lady, as well as for a great crowd's delight as a watching crowd.

Among the rich utensils of her desk were mixed a hand-mirror, a rouge-box, that she had fetched from behind the Watteau screen; a lip-pencil had fallen to the floor.

Unless in her teens teeming with heart's-blood thumping beneath a Sevillian jacket and thumped against by a

tambourine, perhaps this woman had never been more beautiful.

For, in radiant place of the pulsing beauty-quality of vital young youth, and of its successor, that of the innocently false languor and untrue repose reflected from what she had learned with her unerrant vision to call a "painted desert," there shone now the beauty-quality of happiness—a supreme quality, of happiness not supreme, merely in itself triumphant, the happiness of achievement in difficult world and more difficult self, clamped superbly to *Faith*.

As she sat and with so deliberate movements of white chiselled arms wrote in her little book, she was a significant, an assuredly painted picture of sophistication, but of sophistication that itself was neither of paint nor of desert sand, its clearly marked qualifications being a suave worldly dignity, accustomedness, delicate serenity. It was as if Sophistication with her had, like Superstition, refused to leave her, and, in order to be allowed to stay, metamorphosed itself into a righteous, an evolutionary thing, a thing that she had therefore gladly taken with her in her sudden winged flight out of the quick-sanding desert to the coast and to the heights, coast and heights akin, and dwelling together, as they wonderfully do in California, as they still more miraculously do in the fully liberated geography of the soul.

Thus Sophistication had succeeded in continuing with her, for just thus was this woman loved, apparently, by forces as by people—of whom a loving instance made itself felt here, in one of the accoutrements of her desk; for upon it another desk was superimposed: a fascinating miniature thing, its various minute component parts built up into a partial shape of pyramid.

The woman loved it, not knowing *whom* to love; and that it occupied a sacred place upon her desk of Sheraton—sacred obviously, as it was guarded by a sharply defined demarkation of several utensils of blue-steel, gold-inlaid Toledo-ware, but chiefly a sharp, weighty paper-cutter

(as who should say "*Siegfreund!*", or "*Daemmerliebs-kind!*")—was in danger of finding its secret nailed on both the town pump and the church door by the fact that its little black leather shelves were filled, or nearly filled, by little red leather books. Not now were they in their own private case, but this lived safely near-by them, in fact, in this same residence, for in two special depths of it the diva's Cellini-suggesting jewel-case, to the left, fitted with but a wee growl, while to the right the little-red-leather-book-case fitted exactly, without a growl at all.

Minutiae! . . . Of a life, expressed thus, by combined chance and intent, in a flotsam-jetsam bit of a life's apparel. For even in the rare hand-made jewel-box, there was a special compartment—and an empty one, as jewelry goes, for it held but a little fragment of indecipherably stained balbriggan, with no accompanying baubles to protect. And its emptiness of other-ware did not sadden this woman. Here around it in the remainder of the box were her crystal rosary, her various jewelled and gemmed trinkets of the great world's great music-capitals. All her high-light treasures. Only there was not here, as if an empty grave in sooth meant a living body, a string of old, strangely blue, strangely green, delicately wistful beads. As if to make it a very symbol of Giving, she had left the dainty small compartment dedicated to emptiness and the fragmentary balbriggan. The thought of it with her was a matter of prayer and faith—prayer that the neck those beads surrounded might bear no other yoke; faith that the heart they drooped against might one day, one starlit night, be held against her own, fulfilling her prophecy of the violet days, the inspired day, of Cadiz.

And as the moments sped, and the Traviata-like feathered-pen either sped or deliberately paused against the moment of Madame de l'Etoile's London *première*, the woman's present beauty was not alone from all these things. Its two calms of classicism and sophistication were urged, and intensified, and teased by a mood, a

mood that would have painted her cheeks if it could, and that as it could not, painted the air—a mood of impendant *début*, of expectancy, of holiday, of very May-Day, though it was not May; for as she wrote she satisfiedly read aloud, like charges brandished against the armour of her classical appearance, some of the passages that she wrote in her book; and she did this most characteristically, not merely speaking aloud to herself as idiots are wrong-accused of monopolizing; but doing so with someone present, and as if that someone positively did not matter.

For Madame de l'Etoile was not alone.

As if a great art collector had passed a semester after semesters toward a final exhibition of precious taste, and at the then eleventh hour turned his examination paper from a masterpiece into a hardware store by one fell addendum of *gauche* grotesquerie, there was one more chief decoration in this lovely room.

Stiffly on a fragile French gilt chair, midway, indeed, centrifugally between many things, the piano, and the Fragonard screen, and Madame de l'Etoile, and the Watteau screen, and the flowers, and the devil, and the deep sea, and forty and fifty, sat Becket.

Elise having fallen by the great wayside into matrimony, Madame de l'Etoile, with equally delightful recklessness, had embarked for the British Islands unattended; and almost disheartened by the scant likelihoods among innumerable applicants to her newspaper-advertised need, had in a dangerously late moment, and after but one long, all-drinking look at her, engaged the Becket as her lady's-maid. Maid was a necessary misnomer for this treasure, which was not a virginal one, for Becket was not Becket alone, and *Jane* Becket, but *Mrs.* Jane Becket.

If Jane had been the great God Budd, a holy idol made of mud, she would have been similar, but she would not have been entirely herself, for she would so have been a little too softly Oriental. As she was, she was herself entirely.

God had gouged Jane out of wood that only He knew the name of, with great square hacks.

If she had been Gibraltar instead of Jane, there would have needed no name of a life-insurance sign printed hugely in stereotype or electric lights across her to identify her. Had she been one of Madame de l'Etoile's successive little red books instead of one of her successive lady's-maids, there would have needed no such writing across her as Madame was engaged in now, of that word "*England!*"

As she sat so like an island on her fragile French gilt chair, she was in beautiful, dutiful agony. Despite the shocking experience of matrimony (a shock that must have been to Jane such as only a last outrage of the Gulf Stream can account for) she was a mammal of great purity of mind. Partly—and sadly only partly—because of this arbitrary reading aloud, she thought her mistress was insane (Madame's third experience of this gloomy kind) instead of perceiving the simple and far happier truth—that she was drunk.

Least of all would have occurred to Jane the manner and means of her *getting* drunk—with happiness.

England!

After long hours, again I have talked to you, my own, in England—talked *much*, being as I am, always myself entirely in my little red book, and even in England, I find—*your* England, the England that you loved, and loved even more than you loved your Estados Unidos, and once more I am await, and now, this time, this wonderful time, await without one single fright, to conquer still one more Conqueror!

And it was with a great flourish, first of her arm and then of her pen, that once more she breathed and wrote it:

England! That word means violets, Isabel—most of all that word means you—my own—José—José Luis . . . but anyway, violets, Isabel, and—

Once more there was a great flourish of her lovely white-draped arm and lovely feathered pen, once more she spoke quite aloud, to the sharp physical nervous jolt of God's own oaken Becket:

Traditions! Ah, my own, until now I have been a woman of *mañana*. To-day, I am *the* woman of to-night! And oh, my own, nothing, nothing that I can have said possibly to you in my whole little red books has told myself to you more than does that sentence! If at last, after and after and after all, you are ever to read, you will now know that there has been in this world a love that trembled often, and that wavered once—yes, did waver once—but once only, and in a woman then who was not I, but only a painted thing that looked like me—a prettily tinted hour-glass of sand (except in my figure, dear, which was as lovely then—almost—as it is now) that marked the time, and only *thought* itself Time, and Truth, and Space and all Realities. . . . I have confessed to you how I stopped paying in the streets as I used, how God sharply answered me in a way to show me the uncertain amount was overpaid. Now, my José, because something indeed, and something large, remained *not* yet fully paid—now, as to that great debt to People, to—Society—ah, my José, there now is a happy thing that I can tell you. It is that if I sing to-night as I believe and intend I will sing, then to-night, oh, to-night I honourably think will have paid *that* great debt! Yes, and I say so now and here before the trial of it, because there will be the ending, indeed, this time, the real—moreover, dear, the *true*—ending, of my Little Red Book, for then it, and I, can afford to simply sit, and wait, and sing for you. For People too—always, always. But without *duty*. And I am happy!

As if the taxing force of so daring an assertion had brought her to momentary pause, and with it reminded her that she was not entirely alone, she suddenly laid down the pen. But as though nothing, not even the present duty of authority, could quite tear her from the subject of her little book, it was casually, and without looking up, that she said to her waiting maid, her agonizedly

waiting lady's-maid, Becket, Jane Becket, God's Becket's Jane:

"Gwendolean, sit down!"

"Yes, madam!" cried Becket, instantaneously, terrifiedly standing up. Her cry of Madame's title was without an "e," but Madame had spelling of her own to care for, and was proceeding with it.

Yes, my own, I have *with my voice, my honest means*, reached *England*, which for so long has seemed always to me, in the far distance, though but an island in the ocean, yet the very pinnacle of my earthly climbing toward you! And from to-morrow, if I have sung, as I *will* sing, to-night, I will dare, and I dare now to tell you that I will dare, to—— But before I *do* dare that word, my own, let me tell you how very prominent I am! Though but hours, almost, indeed, *scarcely* days, since I have came here, I have been already forth into society. I am *very* distinguished! And I find that the English and American speaking races differ in their language. The English mispronounce the pretty word "Opéra." In London, it is Grand Uproar! And when I explain them about it, and making an English countenance mispronounce it for them the way they do, they laugh at me! And the more and more when I *then* say again, in my anger, "Grand Uproar!" Well, there will be some grand uproar to-night, my own. And *then* I will dare, and now at last dare to tell you that I will dare, really, really at last, to—*hope!*

Again it was as if the very exuberance of her written expression felled the quill from her hand, and this time, as if the word "hope" were one that *must* lift the eyes, she saw Becket, and for a long moment contemplatively absorbed the vision of her.

"Oh," she said at last, "I see! Stand up!"

And Becket instantly, obediently, sat down.

Madame went on writing. Once she looked up suspiciously to see whether Becket had dared to rise again, but God's own was seated in dutiful motionless agony on the sweet guilt chair, and Madame continued writing

satisfiedly, to the end of her page, and then with a long relieving sigh, sat back.

"That was right, the way you obeyed me, Gwendolean! I am very pleased with you."

Becket almost rose, but by terrific will-power remained seated, her hands stretched forth.

"Oh, madam," she cried, clasping them in prayer, "if you would only let me stand in your presence!"

"NO!"

Madame had cried it so swiftly, loudly, that Becket had popped straight up, as if the power had been champagne and she a cork, and with a great gesture Madame spoke more swiftly, loudly still: "*STAND UP!*"

And Becket sank down moaning.

"I do it," explained Madame serenely, "to make my servants comfortable. How can *I* be comfortable as I turn myself into little red books if I know that you for ever more stand up?—No, no! That was not an order! You were doing very nicely, and I was appreciating it. You are very obedient. We begin to understand each other. At the least, I you. Anyway, be cheerful, Gwendolean! You will love me afterward. They all do!"

Becket again clasped forth her hands in prayer.

"Oh, madam," she cried, "I would love you *now, sitting* or standing, if you would only call me by my right name: *Jane!*"

Madame seemed almost to have sprung up herself, so huge and spontaneous was her Latin gesture.

"NO! NO! I have a special reason! There is something in my history makes me do it."

"Oh, madam," cried Becket in pitiful desperation, holding herself to the chair, "I have no wish to poke into your private past, but I am sure you can have no *just* reason for calling me Gwendolean!"

"Ah, but I have!" said Madame de l'Etoile. "You remind me of a little room I had once, and of some thoughts I had there that were a help to me in dressing prettily at that time! And the way I spell you—in such

a fashionable English way," and her voice became exquisite in her care of her pronunciation, "G-W-E-N-D-O-L-Y-N, Gwendolean, you see you have an *I Griega* in you!"

"I have *what* in me?" Becket, half rising, half sinking, cried it in despair and terror. "So help me God, madam, of what do you accuse me?"

Madame de l'Etoile, gazing at her with enormous contemplation, clasped her hands ecstatically.

"My Gwendolean, I assure you you seem to me to be a pure, unadulterated kind of woman! I accuse you of nothing, except of compassing one letter of the alphabet. In English, it is the strangest letter next to double-you, and is called Y, oo-eye, but in Spanish it is named the Greek I, *I Griega*. And of that itself you are not guilty, except in having accepted a position with me, and thereby privileging me the right to christen you. Because, Gwendolean, everyone who comes into my service begins a wonderful, miraculous new existence!"

"But I did not need a new existence, madam!" pleaded Becket, pitifully desperate. "I am sure you do not mean your charges, madam!"

After an instant's thought, Madame de l'Etoile reverted to her little book.

My own, I am so gay, I am going actually to play the grand pianoforte; but first let me tell you one, one more thing, my own! On this night, leaving aside all my other triumphs, yes, even this greatest of them all about to be, think of this, my own: I have a beautiful maid, named Gwendolyn!

She resolutely put the little book away upon its shelf, but spoke to it even as she did so.

"Now I can do what I love next best to talking to you, my own!"

She went over to the piano. One great book stood upon it. It was a score of *La Tosca*, solitary, possessive, apparently, of the room, of the night. Of her white,

languidly active hands, one strayed over the keys, the other through the leaves; but it was far on in the bulky book that her voice, first a mere humming, then with full tones, joined, with a fall to the keyboard of that other hand, the sounding notes of the piano. Absorbedly, she was thinking, feeling, partially phrasing, "*Vissi d'Arte, vissi d'Amore.*" But as if the wrapping lyricism that she had brought about herself were too precious a cup to quaff entire at this transient sand-grind of the running hour, she stopped abruptly, wilfully upon the note that would have fetched the room resonant as a gold and silver organ with the longing passion of her voice had she indulged it—that great swelling note which lifts the hotly yearning melody from one phase to another, indeed as if from one melody to a transcendentalized entity of music. This stopping right here was happy enough for her, whose mind could and presumably did continue it; but it was very unhappy for Becket, who passionately yearned for her to drop that other boot of *Vissi d'Arte e Amore* on the ceiling with the loudest thud possible. For this had happened before; more than once before; and God's Becket's nerves had involuntarily taken to counting those tones of Tosca's lament and to longing to know, arithmetically, which note it was that began, and did not continue—to know whether it was the sixty-first, or sixty-second or sixty-third vocal tone; to longing, and to fearing that never would they know, so difficult was it not to count the piano tones too, which were naturally uncountable. But her treadmill torture was now interrupted by further vocal tones, speaking ones that demanded militaristic attention, for with hands clasping themselves determinedly against further playing into her lap, Madame spoke sidewise to her lady's-maid:

"Gwendolean, when I have lost my voice, I am going to be a painters' model, on account of my vivacity. Gwendolean, look!" And Becket shot to her feet. "No, Gwendolean, while I perform this, you have positively *got to stand!*" And Becket sat down. "That is right. Now,

look first at that Fragonard screen over there." And Becket in earnest agony looked. "That central one, Gwendolean, is called 'Les Hazards Heureux de l'Escarpolette,' which for general purposes means, after all, only 'The Swing.' Is not the lady spirited as she bounds through the air, never minding her slipper that flies off, whether or not it shall hit her cavalier? Now, to prove to you I can save us from starvation in our old age, Gwendolean, look at me! This *tableau* very *vivant* of mine is called, 'Fragonard, Swinging'!"

And Madame de l'Etoile, with a flight of her hands upward, a perilous hurling of her body backward, swirled around upon the piano-stool, her small feet stretched forward, her Grecian garments a fluttering whirlpool, the whole of her and of her breathless motion indeed a *tableau vivant* of the rococo lady so like that only a deep reality of art could have wrought so superb an absurdity. And furthermore, realism fled merging into the literal, for her little slipper had projectiled through the air, and with such fatal precision sped straight home to the sacred centre of Mrs. Becket, that a sharp gasp came not from her but from the gifted prima donna.

"Indeed, indeed, I did not intend it, Gwendolean! Yes, you may sit down for a moment, in the circumstances. Forgive me! But I see from your face that you do not suspect me. Be optimistical, for I am not like this every day. In fact, very seldom. You see—— Thank you, Gwendolean."

She had leant forward, her hands clasped about her knee, and Becket, piously thankful for work to do, had knelt and was returning the errant slipper to its dainty silkened foot.

"You see, this is a very great night for me. Imagine, I am to sing in *Covent Garden*! Consider my prominence! Why, the great singer Mary Garden named herself after this theatre—if you will only believe it, Gwendolean! And in that little misfortune just now, Gwendolean, I am merely like the Irish caballero, who was

accused that he beat his wife, and in defence he answered that he had never once lifted his hand against her when he had his boots on. That is a wonderful story, Gwendolean, as dazzling and confusing as my diamonds. Great scholars contend as to whether he was innocent or guilty. Now, that *other* picture, the one next to 'L'Escarpollette'—” And with a low smothered moan Becket, after her all-short reprieve, returned to her gilded chair, and Madame proceeded to the be-laced and be-silvered miniature dining-table—“is called 'La Cage,' and study the upheld little finger of the hand holding the birdcage, Gwendolean! Have you seen anything else so *dégagée*? You will this moment! Look! 'Fragonard, Serving Soup'!”

And she lifted toward her ear a rococo ladle, and gazed across at Becket. Becket was weeping.

“I know these studies are hard for you, Gwendolean, but this shows you how, if I cannot get painters' modelling to do from my vivacity, I can from my elegance. One must be trained for emergencies, and if I should return to Germany, and decide there, for instance, that you had talent for the stage, all this would be good for you, for they are thorough there, and your lot would be harder than as my maid-in-waiting. Doubtless one of your first parts would be the *withasouptureencomin*gin-*maid*! Have you not your camera about you, Gwendolean? You should be taking my photographs! You could sell them after to-morrow for large sums!”

Becket was sobbing.

“It is a large sum that keeps me with you, madam! I love you, indeed, but I 'ave made a very great sacrifice for you, madam! 'Arsh words at 'ome! My 'usband objected to my wardrobing a diver! 'E could not understand you was a woman! And now 'e understands you! Annette Kellermann!”

“Alas, Gwendolean,” sighed Madame, “I cannot swim through your tears, anyway; so let us plunge into work! You were so contented putting on my slipper! My part

is arduous to-night, and its harness is arduous too, so let us rehearse once more!" And with a concluding loud sob, one of joy, Becket started toward her.

"But wait one moment, Gwendolean. Yes, just one moment I promise you! I have just thought of something, and I am even more important to myself as an authoress than as a diver!"

And with Becket left in torture between the etiquettes of standing and sitting, a delicate, an elfin situation, Madame went to the desk, re-secured the little red book, and wrote.

My own, though I have boasted to you I have been into English society, I did not equally confess to you that my personality sometimes gives the wrong thrill. Some things are more rigid than even in the Estados Unidos. In England it is not fashionable to say "Holy God, what a pudding!" even to please your hostess. Grand Uproar again!

Leaving the small volume open and idle, as if further vital matters of authorship might occur to her, she turned past the little table and toward the screen of Watteaus; and hard upon her motion Becket sped to her, and in her speeding, marked herself with capacity, broke herself out with a stigmata of mechanical engineering. In her flying voyage, equally suggestive of the "Winged Victory" and a guinea-hen, swooping up from the floor the fallen lip-pencil, sweeping as with her other wing from the desk its companion implements, she yet outdistanced Madame de l'Etoile's hand to the screen and stood a slab of it aside, thus adding, in this fair little district of the room, to the function-colour of the diminutive dining-table, snow-tint and silver, a dainty vista of colour-of-*boudoir*. Silver again, for there was a glimpse of a garment of sheer glittering silver, but chiefly pink, and pink, a succession of pinks, shaded, graded, a very crown of them, for dominating here was a hat, huge, and huger with ostrich-plumes; innumerable; of graduated sizes, graduated rose-

tones, down into the palest, from up into the Blush-of-Malta that Daisy would have lusted for; and with ribbons—great, drooping ribbons, of the kind that loop under the chin, and that do not do any good to the chin, or to the hat, but only to the heart, and to the eyesight. But with this Madame was not now concerned; nor, quite as yet, with a great staff that leaned behind it.

"Now, Gwendolean, in this rôle, as I tried to show you at rehearsal yesterday, and when, indeed, you were very praiseworthy, I must be very *so-and-so* as I go in. Even more so than in most grand uproars. Now, in that last terrible moment, I must not even have to *speak* to you. So, when *this* arm does *this*, exactly *so*, it means you are to give me my bouquets of flowers—which bouquets of flowers, on this particular night, we will decide later——"

But Becket, in a desperate ambition that would have fortified her to interrupt Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, cut her short untimely.

"Oh, madam, will you not please decide *now*? Thanking you in the past, your last summons will be soon, and your future call is presently!"

And as she had cleaved Madame's sentence she cleaved the air, travelling like an aviatrix to the piano and back even as she spoke, and piled upon her a great sheaf of orchids.

Debonairly Madame received them in the crook of her akimboed arm, and debonair was her reply.

"Excellent waiting-woman, I have missed only one call in my whole career, and that was from the King and Queen. You see, they did not come! But they are coming to-night, so be cheerful, Gwendolean! Never fear for us, for in action you are wonderful. Now, when *this* arm does *this*, *so*——" And she swept her right arm wide with a great gesture level with her shoulder, "then: My *staff*!"

Praise had not undone Becket. It had not been premature. She had received it with due gratitude and from

it due stimulus. And neither had Madame's great gesture and posture done her much harm, magnificent as they were, startling as were the seeming heightening of her to a thing like the Victory, and the statuesque portrait of her with that reckless wealth of orchids and that forth-flung marble arm. These miracles, Becket had glimpsed yesterday, and they merely helped toward her downfall, giving her one instant's breathless pause in which Madame repeated the gesture and the command, "My sta-a-aff!"

It was this repeated word, so simple, and with it, Madame's countenance, so involved, that brought about the Becket's wrack and ruin.

For in that instant's surprising pause of Becket's, irresistible temptation had come upon Madame as she gazed at her, and with that very English word she had made a very English face, the electricity of her mood outstripping with it even her graphic Fragonards—a face as vivid as her intonation very British-wise of "Sta-a-aff!"—a more than very English face, like King George on a postage-stamp, or even off it, a face that Becket should have liked, save that Becket evidently feared things where they did not belong, so that she stood paralyzed, motionless but for tears coursing from her eyes, and fascinated, as if the opera-singer were a snake, and she no longer a Victory or a guinea-hen, but a collapsible and temporarily undirigible sparrow. And possibly from a sudden real fear of her own for the triumph of her night, possibly, quite possibly, from a thrilled and overpowering instinct to do wrong, Madame de l'Etoile made the huge gesture once more, and the command too, but in a variant form and so loudly that she astonished even herself:

"My cane—Jane!"

And into clamorous dolour Becket burst—as loud as any diver, and as salt and wet, and fled, again the aviatrix, the Victory, the guinea-hen, back to her gilded chair, and sat upon it, streaming and handclasped and moaning.

Motionless, unthinking to drop either the orchids or

the marble arm, the diva gazed upon her fatal work, casting about for remedies.

And one came, in the God-given nature of an interruption, from across the room—indeed from across the Fragonards that basically had levered all this misery.

Over the screen appeared a lax, thin hand, peculiarly signalling, its little finger as far outstretched as that of "La Cage" itself, and with the further elegance of an enormous diamond ring upon it; and as around the edge peered the Maestro's face, and into the room came the rest of him too, with the silence and suavity of some warm shadow stretching toward the sun without which it could not exist, gone were Becket and English accents from the singer's mind. For still one moment she stood as she had been, replete with orchids, outflung arm and white loveliness of sweeping draperies, drinking in not the cavernous admiration in his startled eyes, for she did not think of it, but the love in them; and then with both arms clapping round the great orchids, she started toward him.

But her dispelling movement bringing him toward her, brought the relieved and subsiding Becket into his line of adventure, and he stopped short, up-eyebrowed, at this other picture. It did not frighten her. Much likelier might sophisticated persons have been frightened, for this child dressed for a party, as he certainly was to-night, was a thing rare as Becket after its different manner—a thing of diamonds and of hair brushed most carefully back, but the more profound in its ebony rush for that, and of pomade, and a red carnation, and brilliantine, and a whole bottle of the most awful smell on earth, Sucheau's "Wanda de l'Etoile" perfume.

In Becket's devout relief at such comparative luxuries as his presence, even his voice as he gazed widely at her, widely indeed because she was entire news to him, did not alarm her.

"Shoo-oo-oo-er!" he said, and the strange word was Gilead balm to Becket.

As if the stranger portrait needed a footnote for visitors, Madame de l'Etoile explained it.

"She is my Agony Column. I cut her out of a newspaper. She thinks I am a monster, because I have given her a beautiful name!"

With all his unconscious emanations of weird gentleness, he looked studiously from the Becket to the de l'Etoile, and back again to the drying weeper.

"Shoo-oo-oo-er!" he said, addressing her soothingly again, nodding his head understandingly. "It is a terrible thing to be alone with the insane!" And a great light of grateful love, the kind of love that would make a woman marry her grandfather's physician, came into Becket's eyes for him.

"Well, well," sighed Madame de l'Etoile, "I suppose I *am* rather too much myself to-night! Gwendolean, go out and look at the stage-hands until you are happy!"

"Oh, madam, you wrong me!" cried Becket. "My 'usband, madam, 'as threw me down stairs on your account, but 'e ain't never took away my character!"

"Yes, yes!" insisted Madame imperiously, fearful of another flood toward. "Go look at every one of them, until you are as happy as I am!"

Becket went, indeed thankful enough to go, but heavily weeping again, and with a last hope for justice:

"It is false, madam!"

When she had disappeared, Madame de l'Etoile, orchids and all, went straight into the Maestro's arms.

"These are not mine," he said, tenderly touching the rich flowers, tenderly jesting, "and yet you carry them!"

She looked up at him, leaning back a little in the embrace that yet held her.

"They *are* yours—*therefore* I carried them—to you!"

His arms released her, to clasp the flowers in his delight at her sweet swift coquetry.

"To remember your greatest night!"

"*Our* greatest night!" she answered gently.

He hugged the orchids with one arm, her, with the other.

"You are too sweet, my own!"

Her eyes looked up at him quickly, then lowered, and her words were marvellous with a double dignity, that of both reserve and full love.

"I—I would not allow to call me that anyone else on earth, except—'my own.' But—it is *your* right, your *privilege*, darling, for I *am* your own. *You have created me.* You did not create who I used to be; but you have created who I am, Wanda de l'Etoile!"

"That," he said swiftly, with a sudden impulse of hot fire, "*that* is why I always at this hour, on these grand nights, fear for you! All the times I have trusted you, all times you have made me near madness with pride and happiness; yet trusting you, my own, all those times I have distrusted God, I suppose, for all musicians are very egotistical. Of course, in my case, that is all right, for I am a great genius. But it is a great genius's nerves, too, that I have for you. Reassure me, that, this night, you are not afraid?"

Her reply was with a sweeping literal abandon of gesture, in its one word was a lovely, confident quality of laughter.

"*Afraid!*"

He clasped her back to him almost self-reproachfully.

"It is perhaps that for those nights, you will always choose a rôle new for you. If but in each new country you would but sing something that we *know* makes you great! I think that is one reason I am four hundred years old! You could change *now*—Traviata, Giulietta, Gilda—if you would. Wanda de l'Etoile is *the one* who is allowed to do anything—yes, upon the very rise of the curtain, if she chose!"

"And upon the very rise of the curtain, cheat them—even this English them, who took Gibraltar?"

"Anyway, I thank God," he cried, and threw his hands resignedly in air with a long Italian groan at the very

memory that brought him comfort, "you at least are not attacking them, as you threatened, with a performance of *Isolde*!"

"Darling, you are like *Gwendolean*!" she cried. "Be cheerful! I intend doing it yet, and here in England too, if—if—and I will be a greater *Isolde* than I had ever imagined, for I find out I am very Irish. I have done suddenly something Irish to *Gwendolean*. If she thinks her husband was cruel, will you believe me, darling, let alone the name *Gwendolean*, I have given her my slipper on her stomach!"

He looked swiftly at her, suspiciously.

"With intention?" he demanded.

She gazed back at him with wide-eyed innocence.

"There is no answer! How can I know? Even great scholars dispute it!"

She was irresistible, yet he stubbornly resisted, love's fear driving him.

"*Tosca is no part for you to-night!* It—it is no part for you at any time! Tinsel! Rubbish! Dish-water and a candlestick!"

He lied—but he was a father, and a mother.

She gazed at him blandly, her sunny voice shaded with a hairbreadth of seriousness.

"It was a part for *Ternina*. It was a part for *Mary Garden*. Shall I mention any *more* kinds of poetry?"

He broke in with swift viciousness.

"It is a part for the lady you have given the bird-seed, also!"

Her moment's pensive downward look was ominous.

"I have never confessed to you the full of that evil—nor even to my book. There was one further dastardly action. To the bird-seed I added the largess of a cuttle-fish-bone!—But fortunately, it is a part for other persons too, despite her statesmanship. Remember, you yourself sobbed like *Gwendolean* at that *Garden* party in the *Comique* in Paris. You let me sob, too, though you knew how bad that was for me in those days. . . . But you

must not cry *now*! No, no! Consider, darling, we have set forth against England, and I must be subtle—not cumbersome like the Armada! It is with subtlety I am conquering for us! You see, the English are fond of history, and despite their pretence to the contrary, they are sentimental, and like anniversaries especially. Now, this is the fourteenth of June, and the Battle of Marengo, while poor Floria had her equal hardships, was June the thirteenth and fourteenth. So if we win to-night before midnight, we will have had even some of the anniversary correct! Remember we are Napoleon's forces—or are we the Austrian—or were those the same? I am not as educated as I thought! But anyway, the whole thing was a Grand Italian Uproar, and so will our version be! For instance, that is a nice La Scala tenor we have for to-night. Did you notice at rehearsal? In the Agony Scene, he screamed like Gwendolean in a lemon-squeezer. Let us make a note of lemon-squeezer. I must procure one against my critics to-morrow!"

Though he had known his cause was lost before he broached it, and was additionally helpless now in the springtide torrent of her mood, yet like a bulldog and a mule and Gwendolyn, he still protested.

"All of your reasons and excuses are *falsehoods*! You sing it only because you want to, and want to see me die once more of heart-disease, and for no other two reasons! You are not Milka Ternina. You are not Mary Garden. You are not Emma Eames. You are Wanda de l'Etoile. And you are not La Tosca."

"Not for nearly fifteen minutes yet!" she said blandly, and he groaned. "And then . . . ! Besides, darling, be thoughtful—there is one more reason. One of the attributes to a prima donna is to be vainglorious, a word I have just found out of the English prayer-book, and in this night's gown I am handsomer than in any other—even Kundry's. Can you believe such a thing? I swear to you it is true, darling! It is a *dangerous* gown—I fear to have you see us together! You may fall in love with

me. And if you do not, it may be as bad another way—I may likely fly into a rage of pique and fall in love with you, on account of your indifference! Would it not be dreadful, darling, if you and my gown were to change me out of my career into a vampire, and I should rush about after you, as late as nine o'clock at night? What would be the fate of our money, if I were not in my dressing-room at eight o'clock? I would have to become a movies-actress! I think we would better weep about it, for there are great dangers in my having selected this new rôle for to-night!"

"There is a great danger in *you* to-night!" he cried, suddenly taking her face between his hands. "It is this joyful danger-point that always so frightens me, and never has it been quite, never *quite*, as it is this moment! You, de l'Etoile, could never fail, no," and he pointed, with long shaking finger, upward: "no more than the stars you are named for. But you might, suddenly, in one of these grand moods, *go so far away!* Sing Tosca and Isolde both at once if you must, for *you could!* But consider the loneliness for me, if, one of these over-keyed nights, suddenly, you were only Wanda de l'Etoile, and no longer—*my own!*"

Her eyes as she gazed up at him had grown searching, rich summer succeeding the gay May in them.

"I will this moment reassure you! I see, ah, I see——" and swiftly her voice grew to its full tenderness: "you, like me, are remembering that night we 'remembered.' That Nueva York night, when we remembered even—Cadiz! Well——" She went swiftly across to the piano and seated herself, and it was with now a wealth of passionate earnestness that she spoke over her shoulder: "I promise you that *after to-night, you will always remember—this!*"

Again her fingers preluded "Vissi d'Arte, vissi d'Amore," but now it was in full voice from the first note onward that she sang it, full, clear, an outpouring, filling, vibrating the room as she had done the room in the Plaza

de Loreto that first day, that Cadiz day—overflowing the room indeed, so that just without, postured dutifully as a figurehead, Becket, at the promising plenitude, instinctively, hopefully counted: “Sixty-one, nine, sixty-one, one-hundred-and-thirty-eight, sixty-two stage-hands!” She had not meant to say “Stage-hands.” That was false, false, an innocent accident, a word that had slipped forth from nervous shock because again upon that Apocalyptically numbered note the voice had stopped its song, the more dreadfully to her for its preceding volume; while within, Madame de l’Etoile, as if the rich vocal thing had been uplifting more than in its rising wave, more than in its spiritual qualification, had sprung up, her arms flung passionately forth toward him who had been suffering so very differently over *La Tosca*.

“O-o-oh, ‘Vissi d’Arte, vissi d’Amore’! *What words!* ‘In me, look you, Art! In me, look you, Love!’ And you wonder, yes, *you*, that I have chosen an opera for the sake of words, for my greatest night, for *England!* Even as they are clawed around into the libretto, think, think of them as to *me*: ‘For Art I have lived! For Love I have lived!’ How wonderful, as I think it in English! What a tongue! And have I succeeded to reassure you with it in your own sweet Italian? Yes, yes, I see it there on your nose that I did, and if you still doubt, I tell you I am going to sing to-night as I have never sung before, and sing *it* as *it* has never been sung before! That second is quite natural, as *I* have never sung it, and I am something from another world anyway! But besides that, I am going to sing to-night——” And her eyes went across to the little desk: “not only with all those jewels in my voice, summed up, just as in my Kundry I wore them all, but with all of those treasures, too!” And she pointed. “*Those*, my little red book, *myself!* Are you reassured?”

It was indeed patent upon his nose and all over him that he was, and with her lifting of his mood, perfect as the uplift of that melody, her own springtime had

seized him. With the shot of his eyes, following her pointing finger, to the desk, and their spying of the little red volume thereupon open, unguarded, save by that innocuous paper-cutter, he was instantly a vivid child not only at a party, but at a May-Day party. Two great ejaculations, two great accusing gestures fled from him.

"A-ha! A-ha! *Careless* in your happiness! At last I can read every word!"

And giddy as the Fragonard "Poursuite," they rushed for it together—but with the lady flying in pursuit.

"No, no!" she cried in her whirl behind him. "It is uninteresting! I swear to you, it is a cook-book! When I have lost my voice, I am going to be a cook!"

He had secured it. She stopped his hands flutteringly, pleadingly.

"No, no! You would not enjoy it! It is a geography!"

"You said it was a cook-book!"

She was lightning-like.

"Both! A Cook's Tour book! In our old age I am going to be a guide to English ladies! Was it not a beautiful travelling English lady I first promised I would write it? I will *prove* it to you! I swear to you I will read out from it to you!"

And he let her have it.

"Yes, just listen: the very first day we have came here I have written this: '*London is not as wet as it is painted*'!"

"I will take it back if you are deceptive! That is not *all* you wrote!"

"It is a guide to Grand Uproar—listen: '*Should a great artist who prides herself upon information use a Spanish paper-cutter from Toledo, steel inlaid with gold, to kill a French baritone in an Italian uproar?*'"

Abruptly, he took her face again between his two hands.

"You have left off two words from that question: *my own*!" And as she laid the little book back upon the desk with a little catch of her voice, a low, dim tone

came into his. "I do not have to look into the book for that! You ask *him* all your questions! Do you think I would have read one word in it? I do not have to! It is yourself, your soul, in there, and *I know you and your soul like a book!* Yet the jealousy of parents is the most ardent, yes, the most pitiable, of all jealousies, *my* own, and many times, I could have killed *him* with a Toledo paper-cutter!"

"Ah," she cried, the voice softly golden, the reproach in it only a whisper of silver, "can you say so after that wonderful Paris day when we found the name for the desert I was in? You, who helped to chide me out of that desert, not with chiding but with understanding and with beautiful desire, back toward *him*, helped me by absolving me as of my greatest wrong, though throughout my confessional softening my harsh chiding of myself? You, you of all the world, must know, *do* know, proved for ever that exquisite Paris afternoon as if, when there was not, there had been need of your proving that you knew, as you still know, why I am able to sing as *you* would have me, able to sing *as I will sing to-night!* You, of all, *must* understand why to-night I am happy—so happy that even in my little book I dared to say: 'After to-night, my debt will have been paid. . . . After to-night, *I may begin to dare to hope!*' "

"So happy," he exclaimed, seizing her shoulders, "that one further degree of it now, one further degree of it in you so unused to it, and *all over again* would I fear for you——"

"All over again will you be Gwendolean?" she cried. "Fear not for me, when you know I have only one fault in my character—too lofty a passion for words, as with 'Vissi d'Arte'—and, indeed, I confess, with 'Vissi d'Amore'! What a confession! But for instance, if they must persist to translate all grand uproars into English words, why not *that* grand one?" She pointed to the piano and spoke its grandiose name with almost pitying contempt: "The *pianoforte*—the Soft-Loud! *Soft-*

Loud!" And breaking from him she ran to it and struck a horrible little note upon it treble, with mercilessly jiggling finger, and then a frightful crash upon it bass.

His hands fled to his ears.

"My own, my darling, how can you yourself *bear* it?"

"To-night," she cried back on him with joyous abandon, "I can bear *anything!*"

He captured her again by the shoulders.

"But *can* you? Heed, my own, what I said of those far-off stars—it is but a chance step from the happy pinnacle of the world forth into their spaces, like Tosca from her parapet! I will be confessional, as were you in Paris; I have a great genius's peculiar thoughts and visions of what he has made, and you, my own, in what we have together made, are a great human pyramid, not a cluster of diamonds, though you can at will *sing* diamonds; not a white beautiful statue like that Victory there, though you often and often carve beautiful white statues with your voice; but a thing able to be those things, yet never being them, being always a great thing as human as the great crowds you sing for! Of all the things I adore in you, that is what I most adore. And yet I know the very delicateness of your very greatness. *That* is why I tremble at your lovely abandon to happiness, I who should enrapture at it, this your great London night. One more small reason for that happiness, and all over would I fear, yes, even after your singing to me of that 'Vissi d'Arte, vissi d'Amore'! Forgive me my repetition of fear—I will desist almost momentarily. It is that one of these nights, these moments, by your excessive use of your whole self you will be suddenly not *you*. Not *my own*, but a star, a shower of diamonds, a white statue—yes," and his voice broke, "*the 'Vissi d'Arte,' without the 'Vissi d'Amore'!*"

The wealth of the imaginative picture, the poverty of that breaking voice, filled her own words to overflow with earnestness, yet pushed from them no drop of her rich faith, gay serenity.

"But *this* night, you know that I will, that I *must* be all of those things, and Wanda de l'Etoile, *your* Wanda de l'Etoile, too! Father-and-mother, let me sing to-night as I choose, and from mañana I promise you I will for evermore be full of *ee-ee-easiness*! I will cook everything in my book, and sing the way they do in Italy! Listen!"

And with a swoop down upon her of her Fragonard temptation, she broke into the breathless phrases of the "Rigoletto" quartette, a very vision of a fat woman—fat, gasping—fat as the diva in the Cadiz street.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, hands in air, helplessly captivated by her. "Sing for him to-night, then, as you choose!"

One battle of Marengo was over; her arms went about him gratefully.

"And let me tell you," he said, tenderly, gravely, his relinquishment complete and he his selfless self again, "with my same genius's thoughts that have kept me awake on your account last night, I had quite suddenly another one—so simple a thought; and why, my darling, have you never had it? The telephone book. For I think no other English gentleman would be christened such a name. And, my own, in all the millions of time you have been spending writing these little red books, I am sure you could have read the whole London telephone book, every word of it!"

She shook her head wistfully.

"You think I have never thought of it? But—that would not be the way; not the *Great* way! It must be God's choosing, just as it was when we knew—well, what we learned that sunlit day on the Venice canal. Do you remember—that? . . . And that sobbing that we have spoken of stopped. . . . And how happy, lovingly happy, you were for us both, as I was, selfishly, for myself! Do you remember? And how Venice, ever thereafter, was only another beautiful word for sunlight! Thus it must be, darling, for England. England! Still another word for sunlight—*violets* and sunlight—*Isabel* and sunlight—my beautiful sunlit Isabel, who I hope wears around her lovely

throat that one—one other part of me, the treasure-part that has only been given and taken, that has never been bought or sold!"

Tenderly, hesitant with tenderness, he said:

"Perhaps—yes, *very* perhaps—she will be in this audience to-night!"

"Sunlight at night?" And she trembled a little. "No, no! I must not ask for miracles! Not such miracles as *that*! No, I think not, for the Great Way is not quite like that either, I imagine. I—I have desired it too passionately. So I do not expect it!"

From behind the Fragonards, Becket entered, in quite splendid condition, because she had work to do, for which she lived, instead of Art and Love—as stiff as a marionette and as correct in her part, moving gingerly forward as if there were grooves in the floor, and someone had puffed her from behind as someone opposite pulled her with a string; and carrying a package. She came to a wavering but successful standstill before the personage de l'Etoile.

"Your second call, madam, and here is another bundle."

It was obviously of flowers, and Madame's gesture waved it luxuriously toward the Maestro.

"I have plenty—give them to him!"

The marionette did excellently a hands-up motion of shock, although dropped not the bundle.

"*Unopened*, madam?"

"Unopened, Gwendolean! We have enough for our funeral, lady's-maid, mine and yours. All the stage-hands and scene-shifters will be there, on your side; and that same King and Queen, over here, on mine!"

Becket nearly wept again, but saved herself with a desperate cry of duty.

"It is your second call, madam!"

"True, my own," said the Maestro, warningly. "But you have time to look at these! Did you send them yourself, that you are so disinterested?"

"No," said Madame, "but I can look right through the

box. There have been seated at that dinner-party last night several young English penguins who did not disdain me despite I said Holy God about the pudding. That box is full of o-r-c-h-i-d-s, an English word pronounced *meadow*, and if you do not prize it, give it to my gentlewoman, Gwendolean.—Gwendolean, there are some flowers, from a young gentleman, for you!”

“Then I shall unwrap them to show you. Yes,” he cried at her threat to turn away, “for it is not you to be unkind to anybody!”

She turned back perforce at that.

“Ah!—But I warn you now forevermore beforehand, there will be a card in it: E-n-r-o-u-g-h-t-x-y, pronounced *Sinjun*; or else C-l-e-r-k, *Darby*!”

“They are violets,” said the Maestro.

“Violets!” And for that one word her teasing voice was altered. “Then I will keep this young man myself, Gwendolean, and later, according as you are good or naughty (Naughty!), I will give you some even more English flowers—some Day’s eyes, or Pan’s eyes. No, English is such a wonderful language, I think Gwendolean’s flower would be Sheep’s eyes. Yes, I will give you some *sheepsies*, Gwendolean!”

“And,” broke in the Maestro triumphantly, “no more were they orchids, then no more is there a card, either! It is a letter!”

Incorrigible, she waved it off as she had done the box: “I know every word of it!”

He read aloud, forcing her to listen. “‘Do you remember——’”

“Ah!” she cried interrupting. “Famous words of yours and mine, my dear, but in *this* case? Yes, I remember! He took too many c-a-m-p-a-i-g-n, pronounced —*potatoes*!”

Again he read, insistently. “‘Do you remember *Isabel*?’”

There was a lightning-instant’s silence in the room,

then there came from Madame de l'Etoile a great, swift, spontaneous cry. And her hands lifted.

"Oh, and I have just said the Great Way is not like that! *Oh, when I lack Faith, Faith is poured down upon me!*" She rushed to him, reaching. "Yes, yes, you shall not brutalize me with it as you did about my book!"

"You gave it to me, it is mine!"

"Yes," she cried, "yours, because Isabel is part of me!"

At the intriguing sweetness of it he relinquished the fluttering paper; she kissed it swiftly, ardently; started to read it; and found that she could not, for tears.

"After all, darling, you will have to read it to me!"

And with her face hidden against him, the Maestro read.

"'Do you remember Isabel? From your pictures I *think* that I have found my dearest friend, among the stars. *If you do remember Isabel*—and violets—send one word now that you will see me after the performance. It will make one of the happiest moments of my life, for I want you to see that life has to me, also, been very kind; I want you to meet my husband.'"

"Oh," her voice trembled up to him as he gazed down into her lifted eyes, upon the exquisite, upturned tremulous-lipped face, "oh—*tears!* It is so long, so long since I have cried! Oh, darling, darling, this is an omen, the only one that I truly believe in, *an omen of the whole Great Way! From this moment I will never doubt the final end!*—Gwendolean, go instantly—no, there is not time! I have delayed us, and you must dress me in a whirl—whined!—Go *you*, darling, and bring me back the English from whom I ran away for you! Bring them yourself right to my door, and you, darling, see me—at the close! Do it, do it, for I can promise you now, promise even as I could not those minutes ago, that this night I will sing Floria Tosca as I have never sung before, and that I will sing Floria Tosca as *it* has never been sung before!"

And in silence, the complete silence of utter sympathy and unutterable understanding, he went. Only he stopped for one long, quaffing look at the beauty of her from the Fragonard screen; and at the profound love of that look she called to him:

"Fear not—nothing, nothing, can injure your own or her destiny now!"

Then with his vanishment she turned swiftly to Becket

"Come, we are in a very Latin hurry!"

"I do not know Latin, madam!" cried Becket in terror, deep terror, yet she was again the aviatrix, the guinea-Victory, the engineer electrical, speeding beside her regal employer to the Watteau nook, swirling into it with her.

"Yes, yes, in motion you are wonderful, Gwendolean, and I assure you I am not nervous! There—cha-a-arming, Gwendolean! As for Latin hurry, if anything should really go wrong at the last call, you would have to run after me, for example, and hurl my hat on to me from God knows how far in the rear, for I never undertake it till that fearful instant. . . . Any such hat as *this*. . . . Thank you, Gwendolean. . . . Excellent. . . . I know what I shall do for you—out of all my English flowers, besides the sheep's-eyes I will give you some cow's-lips, Gwendolean! As you do not know Latin, it is fortunate I studied English like everything! As an instance, speaking of all these vegetables, if you should bounce that hat off my bean like Gadski's wig one night, you would be avenged in full for that slipper, but the uproar would be the wrong one! Ah, quick—those violets!" For from across from them she had heard the Maestro's voice in a gentle murmur to her guests. "And then go fetch my friends in!"

They re-emerged, and still was Becket masterly, seeming to pluck the violets out of the air with one hand while she closed away the tiny boudoir with a deft slap of the other upon its screen, and with the same action, as if she had been a great painter or at least his instrument, back-

grounded, with its sprightly guarding group of Watteaus, the moment's ravishing portrait of Wanda de l'Etoile.

For though with the rapidity and precision of a combined harvester and groceryman unsheathing and then parcelling an ear of corn they had left the woman of classical drapery behind, she had not become Floria Tosca quite as yet.

Staff, hat and the famous flowers awaited their destined seconds still. Only the gown thus far hinted her—a simple thing, but extravagantly simple, of sheer, solid, glittering, unrelieved silver from the snow-coloured shoulders to its path on the floor, a thing subtle in its prodigal daring, too, with its lines pushing the imagination confusingly to both the Empire and the Directorate. No colour touched her or that silver, save that vivid carmine of the lips, and, in the instant later, the royal purple stain of the violets upon the gown as Becket planted them in her. And it was Becket had the tall staff. Whether she had had it in her mouth, or lured it to her straight through the screen with something for itself to eat, could not be known. But have it she did, and in her flight across the room at Madame's order to fetch in the guests, she managed to stand it, firm as the column of ivory that it seemed to be, in readiness beside the desk.

"Wait!"

Madame de l'Etoile had cried it suddenly, as she stood expectant, almost frightened at her impending joy, her starry eyes fastened on the Fragonard screen ready to drink its coming vision of sunlight and starlight.

"Take the violets till I motion for them again.—Now!"

She glanced her again to the doorway, went tremblingly, joyously to the desk, sat, and hastily, quiveringly wrote.

My own, my own, I now know, yes, as only Faith complete knows how to know, that you are coming back to me. For

oh, my own, Isabel, my Isabel, this night, this moment has come back!

She put the little red book tremulously, with poignant, lingering finality, home upon its shelf in its case; and as Becket with resplendent propriety fetched in her visitors she was seated there with her eyes flutteringly closed, an exquisite glittering jewel pendant under each of them, the shaking hand drawing back from the little book to press tight against her heart. She knew that Isabel was before her, near her, gazing at her; knew, with her highly sensitized intuition that her silence, the closed eyes, her seated posture might have, in her magnificently altered worldly circumstances, for the moment almost any strange interpretation for the lovely girl; but in this instant of instants she was allowing herself every qualitative vibration of soul-renewing, vivid living.

Isabel indeed was gazing, gazing as the Maestro had gazed, and more—herself ineffably lovely in a soft mist-tinted evening-frock, without further colour save for a string of strange blue-green beads drooping over her white bosom, she was gazing as, on that first day in Cadiz, she had been gazed at—as if this vision of sheer silver and of closed, silver-jewelled eyes were a glimpse of heaven.

And still were those eyes closed, though the two jewels trembled away from them, as Madame de l'Etoile spoke her first words to her friend:

"I told you, that day, I would sometime make myself into a valuable little red book!"

She rose, and with outstretched arm received the precious violets again from Becket, and swept them delicately against her heart.

"Before I even *looked* at you, I had to finish it!"

With the last words she at last met Isabel's eyes, stood motionless, superb, suddenly poised in the happiness of her great moment, then went toward her, longing, first intending, to take her heart's friend in her arms, but helplessly prevented by the wealth of lovingly held flowers.

"Oh," cried Isabel, joyously, almost excitedly, and her own hand holding back with difficulty from the lovely outreached one, "oh, and before one real word, before we *really* meet again, you must be satisfied about my life, as I am about yours—you must meet my husband!"

It swept back the happy nightingale's mind to remembrance of another, a negligible but a courtesy-demanding presence there, swept her reaching hand toward the man standing at her Isabel's side, and bringing a new smile of friendly welcome to her lips, she looked at him. For an instant her brain, her faculties, her instincts deserted her—stopped, as if her heart had stopped. It was José Luis.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

VISSI D'ARTE

FOR an instant; one in whose tidal rushing flow and torrential resurge time, place and feeling were a helpless, hopeless intertwist of things—uncontrollable; and upon which instinct, last to desert her and first to return, had swept wide her arm to keep its proffered hand from meeting his—a great, back-flung gesture of shocked horror.

And with the very disaster of its crashing, graphic outcry of her soul made naked, brain and faculties leapt after instinct back to her, directed her hand to a straw to grasp, a straw with which to beat that spiritual nakedness into another mould; for the fingers had touched the Tosca staff, and the current of the physical and mental supporting stamina of it coursed through her spirit and body, wiped the fleet torture from her features and carved them in marble.

The splendid brain functioning with all the precision and vast dispassion of a clock, she brought her eyes very casually away from his face toward her arm, brought the beautiful imposing staff of ebony and ivory and tasselled silver cords deliberately forward and planted it between them, her arm magnificently postured with it, and met his eyes again deliberately, and with a deliberate greeting.

“How yo doo doo?”

She never knew whether he made an articulate answer; she knew only that brain and capacities had carried her superbly far, only to leave her ironically deficient, for her English had for a lightning-flash of time fallen miles, years, away from her, and her frigidly formal saluta-

tion to him now had been, with all their completely foreign accent and mistake of order, her fatal first words to him in the Rambla of the Flowers. This, in itself, was well, not ill—helped the dimensions of the gulf of ice she was creating, the unbridgable distance between herself and these two English people. But she knew also, and knew it desperately, as she heard her own strange-sounding voice, that the remainder of that speech, dynamic, pregnant with catastrophe, was literally upon her lips, articulation inevitable, too imminent to hold back, and it was with a cruelly hurtful tightening of her fingers on the staff, a further subtle digging of it into the flower-strewn carpet, that the leap of her intellect wrenched the words as they left her into creation not destruction. With electric-swift thought she sent them, along with a languid, smiling droop of eyes, to Isabel:

"Pleece to say yo 'gain!"

And poised, vigorously steadied by the success, the very sound, of all the debonair brutality of their diverted application, she could have held back the one remaining phrase, and intentionally did not; intentionally used it, perfectly as she would have used a chance-to-hand colour for a phrase of music:

"Preety efening, no?"

She knew that Isabel was replying—words that made a pitiful bell-like sound of mingled eagerness and wondering confusion; but the words did not matter. The two—the pair—would be gone in a very few seconds, gone for ever and for ever, if she could hold before them through such a little space her spiritual posture as she was holding her body and that planted staff. And for fortification in it, she allowed herself an instant's complete possession by this night's, this moment's *fact*, its pain too hideous to be felt as yet, but clear to her vision in all its significance as a gargoyle against the noonday sun; and to her madly reacting mind the grotesque body of that monster was the suddenly visible minute economy with which God had reserved her, in an intricately fes-

tooned and warding fool's paradise, pristine for this moment of the corner-butcher's knife: a paradise of blindness from a thousand small chances of circumstance. Chance one, her silly intuitive fear of Society itself that had made her, from some sheer God-suggested sense of sheer decency, look away from that carriage in the Rambla instead of staring at it as she first intended to do and should have done; and of still smaller chances, hundreds, hundreds—chances of talk, and worse—of delicious, whimsical reticences through that Cadiz week, the very star-dust of Fate thrown in her eyes to keep her as blind as the exquisitely innocent English girl; blindness for herself the more complete because her eyes had been so wide open in their recklessness of Faith—eyes that had looked right up from the starving cobbles and deliberately bargained for this with God: "If only now when I need it so . . . and no matter what it might be . . . no matter what terrible pain it might bring afterwards, if You chose. . . ."!

And such, then, was the body of the monster; but bodies are only instruments, and this grinning thing had a soul, and that gargoyle soul staring out of its basilisk eyes at her was the picture, straight here before her, of *his* being here *thus—willing* to be there, willing to meet her, willing to meet her with his wife, whose maid and whose soul companion, essence-of-spirit comrade, she had been; willing to meet her knowing what he knew, and as he thus necessarily would show himself to be: a cad, and a cad with the final touch of God's smiling finger on his lapel—the touch of a gardenia.

A moment of facing a gargoyle *in excelsis*, the first torturing twist of whose horn in her had been the need to efface, instantaneously, the effect of that fatal moment which, brief but illuminating as a forked lightning-streak, must, while it paralysed, have nakedly displayed her.

That first twist, she had magnificently met, for the girl was disarmed—her bewildered, hurt, pitiable words, as she struggled bravely for right ones, were saying so.

"My—my note told you this would be one of the happiest moments of my life!"

Madame de l'Etoile slightly bowed.

"I, too, am very happy, very happy!"

"We are—are stopping in town, at the Savoy." The doubtful little waver had despite her valiant sweetness come uppermost in Isabel's voice, and her husband's took up its difficult burden for her.

"You will have supper with us there after the performance?"

"Thanks, monsieur," said Madame de l'Etoile, "I have supper always alone. In a life like mine it has certain advantages to be always alone."

"Madame will immensely disappoint my wife!" he exclaimed. "Make me the favour to break a rule for my wife's sake!"

She looked briefly into his eyes.

"I used to break rules, and found it did not—*pay!*" And she turned back to Isabel. "You have been very kind!"

With her rejoinder almost a little gasp escaped the beautiful English girl.

"Au revoir!" she breathed.

Madame de l'Etoile bowed to them both.

"Good-bye!"

As Becket with promptly renewed decorum fetched the two back whence she had brought them and formally vanished with them behind the Fragonard screen, Madame de l'Etoile stood unmoving; the staff still planted unwavering in the carpet as if it were a rod propping the outstretched arm of a statue, even her eyes motionless, fastened on the screen as if they penetrated it, looked through it and out through the doorway to the vast stage where momentarily she must follow them, follow to sing; motionless completely, until Becket reappeared with a rush and a gasp:

"Your last call, madam—I could see the boy coming!"

And then her one movement was a swift, abrupt motion

of her left arm, which lifted and dropped the violets as if she hated them. Becket seized them up, sped behind the Watteau screen, dropped them on the dressing-table there and fled back with the huge pink-feathered Tosca hat; and again the left arm of the statue moved—helping her to place it, arranging the great looping ribbons under the chin, falling to position rigidly again. And then Becket sprang to the piano and waited at attention for the command for flowers—astute, stirred to alertest capability in this her own hardest moment by an electricity in the air that moved her and that she did not understand—a thing that came from a smile in the beautiful room, a smile that was not upon her mistress's face, but that that face was gazing at, the sardonic grin that was emanating from a monster and that had spread itself all over the Opera, heart of the world; over all England; over the world itself; over the whole Great Way; over the Gran Via of the Universe, from star to star . . . the smile of a gargoyle which the face gazing at it, in order to give it the power thus to smile, had taken from, and itself put on, its unmoving nature of stone.

Then the eyes moved, for one long instant, to the piano, and the right arm moved, lifting the staff and terribly gesturing with it in one sharp, straight motion three times repeated, toward four great masses of flowers, the dart of the tall beautiful stick writing in the air as vividly as if it had articulated "Those! Those! Those! Those!" Then the staff went back to the same yellow primrose it had crushed into the carpet, the eyes to that centre of stony space before her. Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome painted their statues, and for a handful of flashing seconds it was as if Becket were a Greek or Roman artisan further painting this one of silver and ivory, its touch of ebony, its great hat of varied pinks and its dash of bright rouge upon its marble, as she weighted the violet-emptied arm with a mass of brilliant orange-coloured marigolds, a huge cluster of light blue

pansies, a wealth of pink roses dripping with streamers of silver lace, and a sheaf of royal-purple hyacinths based with poignant deep magenta peonies. Then done with her rich portrait Becket sped to and hurled aside the Fragonard screen, flung wide the doorway to the stage; and through this came the distant sounds of the orchestra, the near sound of a voice—the call-boy's.

"Madame de l'Etoile! Madame de l'Etoile!"

For one instant still the statue of silver and vivid colours with its fixed eyes stood on unmoving. Then once more the staff lifted, and Madame de l'Etoile swept forward to sing as she had never sung before, and to sing Floria Tosca as Floria Tosca had never been sung before.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE SWING OF THE PENDULUM

BECKET was re-carven on a carven chair—a piteous figure, now, of grief—and of its worse friend, terror. And she was the rightly concentric symbol of a scene of rich desolation—suggested only, but as if suggested by pattern, for each quarter of the beautiful room held a high-coloured mark: its four corners owning now the four chosen bouquets, bouquets no longer, accurately pitched to the four walls against which they lay, lacerated marigolds, battered pansies, scattered roses, bruised and wilting hyacinths. And act two had also brought its scars in here, like tributes on a sacrificial altar, for a rare Greek gown of white and gold drooped like the flowers against Becket's chair, slashed to ribbons by the Toledo paper-cutter, which lay on the hem of it, telling its tale that Scarpia's imitation blood had not been enough for the thirst of it. Evidently too Becket had been forbidden to touch it—or the gown, whose furious wounds cried out for decent hiding; because as she leaned forward, and gingerly picked up from the carpet, just before her, Floria's golden laurel wreath to see if that was injured too, it was with a cautious ear to the sounds of distant orchestra and voices filtered into the silence here. And when, while she did it, the treacherous Scarpia shots on the parapet rang out, and shot Becket to the soul with nervous terror, even so she was not so unwary after the night that she had already spent as to regain her ordered posture on her chair-pedestal until she had exactly replaced the circlet of golden leaves on the floor, calculating anxiously from the yellow primroses.

Scarcely was her taut body back where it belonged, when it shivered, shivered all over, for rehearsal had taught her the main arithmetic of this opera, at the Tosca's voice in its last poignant, clarion note—diluted in reaching her, yet terrible even here, vibrant, agonized and agonizing as Floria leapt from the parapet greeting death with her final soul-cry of passionate demand for justice, justice "Before God's throne!"

Scarcely, too, was there interim between that cry and its consequence for Becket. Long since, though the "bonair" of it still glowed the place the Fragonard screen had been set back away from the door. It would have suffered if it had not been, as Becket had learned two hours ago, at the end of Act One. It was then also she had learned that the swirl of Tosca into the place was instant upon the curtain fall—that her creator was taking no curtain-calls. But that had not taught Becket (as why should it?) that she would actually take none at the close, and she shivered anew at the immediateness of it after, when as if by a forerunning gust of her the door was hurled open and as if on the wings of that desperate cry Madame de l'Etoile rushed in and past her like a beautiful tatter of whirlwind, her blue cloak streaming back of her as if literally from that dizzy fall of Floria through space, and thrusting the Watteau screen clattering away from her as she had hurled the door, turned by her dressing-table, a winged Victory gone mad and suddenly halted in its waves, and that terrible voice of Tosca's crying out of the stark marble face in a fierce command:

"Go close that door and *hold* it! Run!"

Becket sped to the door and tried further to obey, but all her Gibraltar strength and spirit could not hold it against the attack of musical Italy whose voice stormed through it.

"Let me by! Who are *you* to dare to keep me from her?" And the Maestro, ashake with passion as she

with fright, towered over her. "Go you outside, and stay there until I come out!"

Having failed her mistress, with a sob she did this new bidding, and from closing the door hotly upon her he turned to face that figure across the room from him, to go toward it, to stand halted by the flare of its cry at him:

"Need I tell you again that I am again a woman of *mañana*? I will not talk to you to-night—no, not to my mother and father, not if you were my *children*! Until to-morrow, I bid *you* go outside as you have bidden her!"

"I *will* talk to you!" he cried passionately, desperately, in an agony of terrified love. "Ah, my own, my own——"

It was furiously, frenziedly that her words cut him short:

"Do not call me that!"

"What I feared for you has come to you!"

He shivered as he said it; and her swift answering words were a deliberate lash.

"Did you come to complain about my singing?"

Cut to the soul by the thong of it, he wiped helpless tears away.

"You were miraculous! They are mad about you! Yes, mad, mad, these same difficult Londoners! And you *insult* them, refusing your curtain-calls!"

"I *sang* for them," she slashed, "and as no one ever has sung for them! I have *given* them *what they paid for*! What more should I give? Thanks? Let me tell you, I am not thanking even *God*, to-night!"

"*Once!*" he pleaded. "There still is time! Just once before the curtain!"

"I *have said*," she answered. "Till to-morrow, *go!*"

His last plea abandoned the audience; by instinct drew his two hands forth heartbrokenly, despairingly, for himself alone: "*My own!*" And the hands dropped hopeless, empty, at her cry of rage at the words. Husky, tremulous, he said: "Forgive me! I am suffering!"

"A-a-ah!" she cried, the long contemptuous ejaculation a very shrug of musical sound. "Only women suffer at the closing of doors! *GO!*"

Outside that closed door, closed now as for an eternity because in his imagination it would be an eternity until to-morrow, Becket, her fright of him gone at the sight of him, reached out a hand, quite unconsciously as if she were a mechanical doll built to pat poor folks, as he blindly passed her. She had been await, eagerly await, for in her other hand something was clutched tight, tight as in a mechanism, something with which, as if it were somehow a protection to her in the daring she must embark on, she ran swiftly to Madame.

"Madam, your two friends that were here——"

"I told you I would see no one!" cried Madame fiercely. "Have you disobeyed me?"

"They beg so hard, madam!"

Her mistress seized her shoulder with one hand, with the other pointed toward the door.

"You followed *his* orders! *Will you obey those strangers, too, instead of me?*"

"The lady is crying, and I felt so sorry for her, madam! And she begs in the name of these——" And Becket, abruptly as if a penny had been put in her, opened her tight fist palm upward and displayed there the things that pennies must not touch—the Astarte beads; and mechanically recited her lesson: "She begs *in the name of these* that you will see her, madam!"

A shiver came over the woman, a moment of struggle at the twist of the gargoyle horn, then it was with a hard laugh in answer to the new grimace of episode that she took the tenderly smiling things from Becket's hand.

"Tell her," and she spoke slowly to register the reply lesson in the mechanism, "tell her: *she is very kind to return my property to me!*"

With a gulp for reply, Becket left her. And in the silence Madame de l'Etoile seated herself at the dressing-table and for a long moment gazed at herself in its mirror.

As she gazed on, intent, intense, brooding, suddenly she became aware of something, as of something seen in a pool, and horribly fascinating to her. It was the violets that had stopped undisturbed there since she had dropped them revolted to the floor hours ago, and Becket had recovered them.

Still looking at them in the pool of mirror, she felt for them, secured them. And then having wrenched her eyes away to look down at them, she lifted them, and struck them, and again, and again and again, on the edge of the dressing-table.

"It was *he* used to give them to *you*! *He*! Now you, *you* give them to *me*!"

A stroke and a rhythmic, hot accent of word . . . and again, again. It was not the mere wantonness of a wayward one now. It was the first articulation, and conducting of the stirring, fermenting melody of revolt that with that motion, hours since, to repel the flowers from her, had silently begun its composition in the nightingale's heart; the beautiful bouquet a malignant *baton*, the white-hot dulcet words a song of hate.

And when she had battered the lovely thing to brutally scattered fragments, she seized up the Astarte beads, and again gazing into the mirror, put them slowly, deliberately, with a soundless laugh, around her neck. It was Part Two, silent but unmistakable for spirit ears to hear, of her terrible song, throbbing on with movements inevitably rhythmical as she went from the dressing-table to the desk, and back again fetching her jewel-box, and, again at gaze into the mirror-pool, selected and donned her bandeau of brilliants, and selected and donned more jewels, more, with weighing, calculating fingers and eyes that would have called them, if the song had spoken here, "*Loot! Loot!*"

Almost the set lips were smiling "*Loot!*" as Becket re-entered the silent, surcharged room and with a beautiful determination of purpose in her very fear, came up behind her.

"Madam," she said, "will you not please to let me help you some way? Madam, indeed, indeed, as a kindness to me? Beforehand, I fear I did not please, because I thought you was insane, madam! Now I know better, madam; you are in trouble!"

The pool-gazing face turned slowly to Becket, and brilliant with its rich bedizenment fixed her with its dark eyes.

"Attend tu! You are to do exactly what I say! Take the car, and go home—to your *own* home—and dismiss the chauffeur for the night. On the way, find a public car and send it here to wait for me till I come out. *A public car!* You failed me once to-night—you failed me——" And a glittering finger pointed: "——*at that door!* Will you fail again?"

"No, oh, no, madam!" exclaimed Becket. "But you frighten me, and I wish to be with you!"

"I wish to be *alone!* I have a purpose to wish to be alone, right here!" And the question, in the exact tones of its first asking, asked again: "Will you fail again?"

"No, no, dear madam, I will not fail again!"

"I am glad. Good night." With a miserable look back of her, Becket started away; but the voice recalled her. "Wait. I—I am very fond of you—Jane. Kiss me." She lifted an arm around Becket's neck, drew down the tear-swollen face, and kissed its lips. "Good night."

Alone, the reflection of her servant's receding figure vanished from the pool of glass, she swept together the drooping violets scattered on the dressing-table—two handfuls—gazed down at their withering comrades on the floor, rose and walked to the door, reopened it and gazed out across the great space of boards.

The stage was already dim.

A last few of the stage-hands were still at work in the dusky light.

Standing back on to the sill of the dressing-room so that she was framed sharply by the crisp lines of the doorway, she lifted her violet-filled hands slowly above

her head in the remaining instinct of her night's terrific impulsion of drama, and as if with its last vibrations crushed a thick perfume out of the purple flowers into the dim-coloured air.

Then, twisting the stricken things in her falling hands, she began to walk forward and back through the room. Again and again, she walked forward, back. Forward, back were not enough; and, the clenched hands of it sometimes at her sides, sometimes lifted to press the hot bruised blossoms passionately against her face, the silent throb of her terrible melody carried her to the four flowery corners of the room, the corner of the marigolds, the corner of the pansies, the corners of the roses and the hyacinths. They were not enough; and as if they marked the boundaries of a cage, and the open door a way to freer confines, she passed through it to the great painted desert of the stage, and on and on, and back, and again, on, from side to side of it, her steps falling more and more into the pace of a prowling animal.

If God was answering the silent awful song of her soul from somewhere above her, it appeared only in the wavering of a dark, vague canvas set. A stage-hand stepped toward her, pointing and about to speak, but she only glanced up, and shrugged, and at the contemptuous motion, and the sight of her face, he wavered an instant, like the helpless set, then went hastily away.

Out of the painted desert and its dim-lit night, her strange way and her rhythmic silence led her—back into the brilliant nightingale cage of flowers. And centred in it, suddenly, she halted. The desert path was strewn with most of the violets that had been in her hands. The last petals that stopped in them she lifted in the two palms, and deliberately, to know the full bitterness of violets, ate them. Then dashing the emptied hands together, she looked slowly upward.

"So, God, *that* is how You had it planned! Very well! God, I defy You utterly!"

With the cessation of motion the beating melody had

changed from the rhythm of silence to the rhythm of sound.

"So, after my long struggle, that is how You had it fixed! What was the use, then? For what have I fought to become good, and to express *You*? Are You a sarcastic, sneering God? Evidently! Very well! At least I now *know* that, and there ends *some* of Your power! Is it not so?

"To-night, You have answered me and my long attempt. Now I shall answer You. Hereafter, I shall live as I choose. You know perfectly, that I turned from the streets and their life, and staggered upward. And for that, what have I? I have bitterness, horrible, unbearable bitterness. Is that the reward of leaving an unthinking life for a thinking one? Then I shall go back again! The pendulum has swung!

"Since time began for me, at the Epiphany, it has swung from pole to pole for me—swung from the wrong side of hell to the other side of heaven.

"Now, let it swing back! Let it swing as it will with me, without my thinking or caring, until time stops, and I hang motionless in death with the rest of the unthinking, uncaring world! From now on, I shall not think or care, except for what time's moment brings, and to have my all of what that world calls 'life,' and 'living.'

"Hereafter, I shall live exactly howsoever I desire. And if the world has a calamity in the fact that my voice suffer, then You, God, will suffer more, for You gave it to me.

"Anyway, the voice has been mine, and I have been worthy of it, and fulfilled it, and there the matter ends.

"And there, God, is *Your* tragedy! What has been given by You, cannot, even by You, be taken from me! What has been, even You cannot alter! For instance, I had *him*, for a whole week, in the Calle del Carmen!

"And having taken him away from me; and then after long years having taken the *hope* of him from me, with one dagger into me from Your having *sent* me that hope

at all, *inspired* me with it, and another and worse one in the form of my own natural, pitiable, mere *thought* of infidelity to it; and finally, to-night, after having let me with complete contrition turn back again to beautiful vision and replete, completer *Faith*, shown it all, all, as a hideous *laugh* at me, what more can You do? I ask You—what more can You do?

"Take away the fact of that week? No. Or stop me from that backward swing of the pendulum to the old life, that old life that I lived with a purpose, the purpose of keeping body and soul together in the world You threw me down into, and that now I shall live *without* the hateful necessity? No.

"Or, after all, can You? Can You stop me? If You can, how are You going to? What new distorted grin of fate can You think of now, with which to frighten me off from it?

"For let me tell You something—that I shall play a different part in that life now! Now, *I* am the one with money! *I* shall be the one that need not think! *I* shall be the one that need not suffer—the one to close doors, to *hurl* them shut, without the need of pain! *This* time, *I* shall be the *man*! Where money need be paid into the Trudge Market, *I* shall pay!"

Pendulum-swing or prowl of baited creature, the melody was now of double rhythm, rhythm of motion together with rhythm of sound, for again she was walking, walking, walking; and a laugh broke from her, its music waving with the sway of her skirts to the mad time of her terrible pacing.

"Again, the old walk, walk, walk, walk, walk! Yet——" And again the laugh gusted out from the room and along the dusky stage: "——I need not walk now! Now I need only summon!"

The stage was almost black. One light shone, far across from her. One stage-hand hovered ghostlike in the wavering shadows.

"I have told You in words, God, that I utterly defy You. *Now* I tell You so in *act*."

She stepped forward into the doorway and its streak of illumination that ran from the rich nightingale cage out against the wings.

"*Do You see that poot dirty stage-hand over there?* Probably You do, for the world says You watch the meanest of Your creatures. Well, watch me, too, as I step back into the gutter! You who set the pendulum in motion, watch it swing in me, in me, de l'Etoile, who struggled her way upward from poverty and its spiritual dirt to money and its spiritual caste! Watch me go defiantly back along the Gran Via, not from necessity now, but because I choose and because I dare, because when I strove toward You and set my teeth to believe in You, You injured and laughed at and bruised me! Yours is the Great Way—watch how I travel it, then!"

Laughing, she gazed across the great stage and imperiously beckoned the solitary stage-hand toward her. As she leaned back against the doorway he came over with shambling, hesitant gait—a short, street-type of man with his cap pulled to one side of his head.

"Come here, boy." He came close to her, but embarrassed, and with averted face, and she laughed softly. "I see you are the last man here. Well, the last man shall be the first! Come in here! What is the matter?" And she laughed again. "Are you *glued* to those wings, like an *angel*?"

She drew him in through the doorway, and he submitted fascinated at the touch of her fingers, reluctant like a shy adolescent boy, keeping his eyes from her, his hands twisting themselves together as if they longed to have his cap in them.

"Boy, you know who I am, I suppose? But I need not have asked that—you have seemed to be at my heels the whole performance! You look the Apache from the dark arteries of obscurest Paris! It is obvious that God sent you to London especially for me! I noticed your

cap from under my hat. We wear them at exactly the same angle! I think you have had actually the impertinence to admire me! Well, your impudence is to be strangely rewarded—yes,” and she repeated the word wickedly: “*strangely!* I have a car waiting for me. I am not going home to-night. I wish you to ride with me.”

He did not answer, and she laid a hand upon his arm.

“You know I am Madame de l’Etoile. And I mean what I say. I do not care that you know who I am.”

Again he did not answer. His back was toward her, and she laid both her hands upon his shoulders. When she spoke now, her beautiful voice was the wheedle of the streets, its heavenly music purring in innuendo, exquisite, horrible.

“I tell you I do not care that you know who I am! I wish you to go with me.”

She could feel him trembling under her hands, but still he was silent.

“Come!” she whispered, drawing him backward toward her, with her arms slipping slowly round his neck, and then with her cheek pushing off his cap and burying her lips in his black hair. “What is the matter with you? Have you a wife that you are afraid of?”

“No!” The short syllable was low and husky, though with a helpless passion in it that had seemed to force him to speak it.

She laughed, drawing him still closer against her.

“But,” she exclaimed with her low laughing tones almost incredulous, “you are not going to tell me, boy, that you are scrupulous—*you*, of your class? Good! More and more then, I can do the utmost that I could wish to do! As you are scrupulous, like a woman, *what is your price?*”

He started to look at her, but could not make himself, and the twisting motion of his body in her embrace turned to an impulsion of flight from her through the doorway, and wrenched from her a commanding, an equally instinctive, cry.

"Wait!"

He slumped in the fierce mandate of it, quivering.

"You have seen and heard to-night, *me*, Madame de l'Etoile. Come, then, I *am* Madame de l'Etoile, mind, and I am not used to being disobeyed!"

He was trembling more and more in her arms, yet again he did not answer in words, while slowly, as if compelled more by some burning impulse in himself than by her burning lips or the contemptuous words that had fallen from them, he put his hand into his trouser pocket and having withdrawn it, held up to her, back over his shoulder, a tight fistful of money.

As she realized what it was her answering voice began as a laugh derisive, that slid swiftly into tones of anger and ended in a cry of rage—but rage which, though it tore through the entire entity of her, body and soul, yet did not tear away her hands from him, but coursed through their clinging and dug her fingers into him so that his head and shoulders were crushed back against her bosom.

"You poor, pathetic fool! Did you think that you could *pay* me? Yet I could love you for being willing to, you poor thing at a few shillings a week! Do you insult me, or is it tribute? Shall I love you, literally love you, or hate you, stamp on you? Put it away, I tell you!"

At her screaming order his hand obediently fell; yet he stubbornly kept his shaking fist around the money and would not return it to his pocket.

"You poor fool," she said again, holding him powerless against her, and laying her quivering face upon his head, "I believe that in your beastly man's pride you thought you *could* pay me—you, a low, pathetic labourer, pay me, a woman rich in money beyond your dreams, rich in power beyond the dreams of the richest bad men of social London! I tell you, boy, I *offered* myself to you! And if my contemptuousness has so angered you that you would dare deny me, I will not have you kicked out of the house to-morrow, as I could, I will *yet buy*

you! I have offered you money. If I must, I will take the jewels off of my hands and cast them before you! What frightens you so? The very bedazzlement of what I offer you? Let me teach you more of the jewelry then! Boy—man—I have not had my arms even thus far around a man's heart for years! Years! And you thought that I would take your little money! And you still have it in your hand! How do you dare, when I have said to put it away? I will show you the power of money with me—I will show you a fire in my eyes that will light it into flames to sear your hand! Let me tell you something! *I am a woman who has defied God*, and I *will* not be defied! Turn around and look at me! Turn around, I tell you, and look me in the eyes!"

And as she drew away her passionate hands he turned, shaking horribly from head to foot, and looked into them.

"So," he said, "*you are, and were, what Lola said you were!*"

She stared for a second, then with a wild cry recoiled from him, the hands fluttering, seeking for support upon the canvas set.

"Holy God! Holy God! *Jaime!*"

She raised the hands to cover her face, but as if, robbed of their grasp upon the canvas, her weakness were too great for her, she swept them blindly back of her again, clinging as she had clung to the window of the Royal in the Rambla, long ago.

"God! God! You have answered me!" she whispered.

He took a faltering step toward her, and she stared at him dazedly, almost unbelievably.

"So my little friend—Lola—betrayed me!"

Though his step had faltered before her, his hands clinched with his words.

"No, *Madame de l'Etoile*, with all your jewelry and money to command and summon, you shall not say that word 'betrayed' about Lola, who worshipped you as I did!"

"Yet," she whispered, still staring pitifully at him,

"she told *that* about me, to *you*——" And a little sob crept into her voice: "she, my little friend! Oh, tell me about her, Jaime, if you know! What became of her?"

"Yes," he said, slowly, bitterly, "I can tell you about Lola! We did everything you told us to. We got married because we promised you we would if something should happen to you. I turned to a scene-shifter because you said I should, and trusted God to care for us in the summer. And He did. You were like a saint to me and Lola. And when at last God was blessing us with a child, we hoped it would be a girl-child, so that we could name it after you! Yes, even I, the father, hoped that our first child would be a girl-child,—for your sake. But even a good woman can be jealous, and it was when I said that once too often, with her in her condition—which you, Madame de l'Etoile, a woman knowing nothing of such matters, yet even so might *try* to understand!—it was then when I said that once too many, that she cries out on me, 'You love me, your wife, less than her, and if it is a girl-child, I shall therefore call her "Bitter," "Bitter" instead! Do you know what our *Saint* was? Do you know how your rent used to be paid? Do you remember the money she used to find in the street? *She found it in the street, yes, but not by looking at the ground! She was a bad girl!*' And do you know what I did at those words, 'She was a bad girl'? *I hit her!*'"

The woman before him, staring at him, drinking in his words, had made no answer save once, and again, a plaintive little "Oh!" but here at his terrible imitative gesture she cried sharply out as if she had herself been brutally struck, and again her hands struggled for their support back of her.

"And when the child is born, *I* name her not Dulce, but Dolores, for with my blow and the birth Lola *dies*, and dies *on your account!*'"

A moan came from the woman before him. Her hands were helpless now. The strip of the painted desert that she had clung to was less prop than had been even the

slippery glass of the far-off Rambla window; and she sank slowly to the floor. From her crushed, sitting posture her voice came in a terrible faint whisper.

"And it was Lola told me: '*She kills herself. But first she kills her parents, friend, and lover*'! God, you have answered me!"

He stood over her with his speech more rapid in the conflict of his two fighting emotions, the desire to hurt, and the rending of unconquerable love.

"And to-night, you cheat me out of even my revenge! When, since the time Dolores was born, I have kept on shifting scenes *as you told me to*, but doing it in this England watching to have my revenge upon you, because it was for an *Englishman* that you betrayed me, now since I have found you, I cannot, for despite you are all covered with your high station and your jewelry, you are in a great trouble and I am sorry for you and I can do nothing! I did not know what I would do, for I could never hit you as I hit Lola, having thought about it beforehand! And when I have known you are an opera-singer, and will sing the Traviata, I think I will wait, and the money I have saved, the sum you must have helped with on the rent, I will throw at you in that opera, but when I saw you at rehearsal, saw you at last, I thought I could not wait for Traviata, and I will go out when to-night comes and on the stage while you are singing, tell your crowd what you were! And to-night comes, and I have not the heart, for I see *that Englishman* here to see you, *and with another woman*! And I know then that he has thrown *you* out for *her*, as you threw out *me* for *him*, and I have not the heart left in me against you!"

Only another little moan came from her in the bitterness of it.

"But," and his voice flared to determination in a gust of recaptured hate through his desolate love, "thus much heart I have left, that you have got to take back that money for the rent you helped to pay, yes, this money that I have here in my hand!"

And at that twist of the gargoyle horn a cry, words, came from her.

"Oh, Jaime, Jaime!" she begged him, shrinking back from the hand, struggling with her own hands on the floor.

"Yes! Yes! You must take it!" he cried desperately. "You must, you must! Anything, anything I would do for you, Madame de l'Etoile, except not make you take back this money for the rent!"

And despite her pitiful outcry he seized her, and overbore the terribly fluttering hands, and thrust the money down into the bosom of her gown. Then with a sob he dropped her, for he thought he had choked her.

His hands and their money had touched the Astarte beads, and with the flashing thought of their exquisite tradition they seemed to her to have shrunk like a noose around her throat, and a strangling cry had come from it.

Through her stark gaze upward at his terrified face and shaking figure, she succeeded in speaking to him.

"You have not hurt me, Jaime, except my feelings."

Another and a different sob broke from him and he stepped back to her, and fetched the money out of her frock.

"Even that, I cannot do to you!"

He stepped forward into the light of the beautiful room and threw it despairingly into the four corners, among the thrown-away flowers, and stood himself among them wilted and drooping as they, bent-shouldered.

She had struggled shaking to her feet.

"Oh, Jaime," she whispered, going slowly over to him, "you would never understand! Jaime, is there nothing in the whole wide world that I can do for you?"

He hung his head, and threw out his hands from his sides in a hopeless gesture.

"You gave me Lola. And she is dead."

"Oh, Jaime, Jaime," she pleaded, "all these years I have not been as I was to you just now! Oh, Jaime, will you not let me give you these, yes, all these," and

her hands not only lifted their own glitter, but lifted on to the glitter of her hair, "for your little—Dolores?"

"No, no!" he cried sharply, merciless again. "If— if it was a man-child, perhaps you could not hurt it, but— yes, I will, I *do* want to hurt your feelings, any way I can, and my *girl*-child shall not wear *your* jewels, Madame de l'Etoile!"

For a moment, her head sank completely; then she looked up at him.

"So there is nothing, nothing I can do for you, Jaime?"

He stood before her in silence for a moment.

"No," he said then, shaking his head, "I think there is nothing we can do for each other, on account of your character."

With quivering lips, she nodded, her eyes away from him for an instant, then seeking his again.

"Good-bye, Jaime."

"Good-bye, Dulce."

Almost unconsciously, and like two miserable, unhappy children, they kissed each other farewell, their hands clinging together for a moment. Then Jaime, pulling his cap still further down over his eye, shambled, stoop-shouldered, from the room.

When he had disappeared, she stood gazing before her until the sounds of his heavy footfalls had died fully away.

"God, You have answered me!" she whispered.

She looked dazedly, strangely about the room, went to the dressing-table for her jewel-box, to the desk for her other box of jewels, the case of little red books, and clutching them against her under her cloak, went swiftly, silently out.

CHAPTER XL

LA GRAN VIA

THE Sagrada Montaña is a thing vast and very beautiful, and its history is very wonderful and strange. In Catalan, the language of the Catalonian peasants, it is called *Montserrat*, Sacred Mountain; to all other Spaniards, it is known as "Montserrat"—serrated mountain, notched mountain, mountain with upturned teeth, like the teeth of a saw.

It is Spain's guardian and miracle of the Pyrenees, rising sudden, unaccountable and isolate out of the great plain of Catalonia, overwhelming with its huge immobile grandeur the soft round foothills swelling and aspiring all about.

It is a mammoth mountain of sheer stone. It towers four thousand feet above the surrounding hills.

In the distance, its great bulk lifting to triumph the cragged line of wild stone forms along its top, it looks like a legendary and impossible castle, ineffable in power, quietness, and beauty.

It is pure grey in colour.

And the purity of this rough stone grey is set exotically and arresting in the midst of perfect and contrasting hues.

Though Spain is a bright and southern country, it is here as if God had not intended the sharp sunlit painting of an Italy or a Mediterranean Africa; it is as if He had taken His palette of colours and thoughtfully mixed His tints and then deliberately sifted them down through a sieve of fine air—choosing pink and white to dominate the hills with modifying streaks of gentle green, and leav-

ing the chance of sky to make the whole acute or suave with its mood of haply brilliant blue, or happily cobalt thinned with haze.

Such are these big and little foothills of the Pyrenees that undulate and slowly raise the Catalonian plain—small round and oval mountains of pink and red-pink earth, ridged and beautifully lined with natural terraces of crumbling white stone, as if they were ancient tinted amphitheatres, conical instead of concave—to outlook a panorama of Life instead of a concentric play of it—and climbed over by the yellow and green of straggling vineyards and dotted with the deeper and pyramidal green of little cork trees.

And from out of them abruptly, stands the Sagrada Montaña, unreasoning and final from its immense base to its fantastic crown of tortured stone, as if the maddest of architects had built it there in a deathly ecstasy. To the pilgrim whose vision comes upon it unexpectant, it is unreal, miraculous—like a mirage, or a grotesquerie of cloud. For in this austere yet ever sensuous country, why, suddenly, a bare and dominant mastodon of granite?

Almost pendulous in its quality of beauty, yet gigantically strong, like a Colossus, in its effect of standing boldly and confidently on the earth, it is grey, grey, for ever wonderfully grey. Grey everywhere; save in one spot where, near its centre, two-thirds toward its top, clings the yellow-brown Monastery of the Montserrat, an eyrie cloister built of yellow bricks, seemingly intermingled with, only dimly segregate from, the massive rock. To the eye looking upward from the terrible base, it is merely as if God had here stained the grey granite with the faint yellow of dripping water.

And indeed, at certain seasons, water gushes just above this high and distant spot, through the very body of the granite monster. For though discernible from below only as a dark line, like a vein in the big grey body, here above the monastery lies the wild, rugged fissure of the sacred pile, the fearful *Valle Malo*, the “Bad

Valley," that leads from the high niche of the holy settlement, on up and up, and through and through, the wondrous mountain—ever higher and higher, through this last third of its dreadful height, to its utmost top.

In His creation of it, God had one more thought: He placed at the foot of the giant, like a liquid serpent warding it, the beautiful and winding Llobregat, Spain's prettiest and most tortuous brown river, which cuts and cuts its way about the base, through a fair circuitous valley of the multitudinous pink and white round hills.

But at that time, when the stone mountain and its guardian river were but newly created, there was no *Valle Malo*.

Then, the Sacred Mountain was a thick, unimpregnated mass of solidity; peopled all over with vegetation, to be sure, green and flourishing on its heavy unresponsive grey, but without any rend and tear of artery through the heart or lungs of it. It was quite solid.

Then Christ came into the world, and left it; making in it and bequeathing to it the most awful and immeasurable space of history destined for it, and culminating this record with the most lasting and exquisite of all the world's deaths.

And at the moment of that death, of the actual escape of His spirit from the poor lacerated carrion thus abandoned on the cross, far away in Spain the great stoical granite mountain screamed and wept, and in its protest and horror rent itself asunder, and held up for God's sympathy and approval a great wound in its breast.

So the Bad Valley was created—because, and at the moment when, the terrific Man died.

Perhaps the storm and bleeding of that huge catastrophe were written on the walls of this *Valle Malo*, in characters of crevice and fissure, in some un-readable language of God's own.

It is possible. Yet this "bad" valley is truly a place of equally unutterable peace and quietness, and the actual

terror and morbid thunder-and-lightning fright of the Crucifixion do not breathe from it or in it.

The reason for this is very simple. God's answer to all mysterious and humanly unanswerable things, is Time. And here in the *Valle Malo* His slow pendulum has swung forth and back, grazing the rough angry walls for years and more years and then hundreds of years, until all the hideousness and morbidness of the tragedy are gone, and only the grandeur and solemnity and symbol and beauty remain. That is God's beautiful way. His grand way.

Then, later on, the Sacred Mountain took its first erect step, like an infant after crawling—its step into tangible history, a step timorous yet decisive, holding fast to the guiding hand of God and lifting its foot waveringly forward, setting it down upon the *terra firma* of desultory manuscript, keeping it bravely there until the queer, tortured nature of the Middle Ages happily resolved and expressed itself in the great art of Printing, and died upon the rude altar of Architecture that it had built for itself—died smiling, with its arms stretched out to its child which had killed it: the printing-press.

And while it was taking this early baby step, the Sacred Mountain had looked down and seen, as it were, some of God's small insects climbing up about its doubtfully descending foot—a small incidental swarm of ants, patiently building a little yellow-brown ant-hill.

Of its own very nature patient, even in its youth, the Mountain did not stamp the ant-hill away; and so new history began, and throve.

The black ants were monks; the ant-hill was the yellow monastery.

The Mountain smiled.

It had no need to crush the builders or their building. The ant-hill was destined to be withered or let live by God or Time, according to the will of Time or God. The Sacred Mountain could afford to smile. God's pendulum was long: it was now only eight centuries since the death of Christ.

The ants worked on and prospered. But Time, too, even more indefatigably than ants, is for ever at work; and the slow pendulum swung and swung and crumbled the ant-hill. Yet the black ants were ever fervent and patient, and built and re-built the yellow monastery.

And it is said, by word of mouth, and, since, by the long-ago parchment manuscripts painfully written—so painfully as the use of blood for ink quite often—before the rosy dawn of printing, and, still since, by many a printed word, too, that God, like the Mountain, smiled upon these ants for their zealous insistence, and rewardingly put into their keeping the Holy Grail, and therefrom into their history Parsifal, and Kundry, and Amfortas.

It may be so. For could anything be more fabulous than such a Sacred Mountain?

Just now, in our own little Time of very different wonders, near to the base of the mountain and on this side of the river Llobregat, there is a crude and homely little railroad station, called Monistrol.

Into all this beauty, out of the arriving train from Barcelona, a woman stepped onto the platform of this mean wooden station of Monistrol. In the golden sunshine, out of the thick of her pre-occupation, she gasped at the beauty before her and around her (for she gazed vaguely about); a beauty that, though dwelling in every possible direction of the eye, seemed especially to concentrate, and run in a determined track, straight toward the grey mystery of stone immediately opposite her. Swiftly she remembered that her railway journey was not yet over, and she hurried across the platform, went through a tall gate, and took her place in the absurd, strong little train that climbs from the main railroad to the level of the famous monastery.

Chug! Chug! Chug! The song of climbing had begun for the sturdy, childish little engine.

Gazing out into the vast landscape she felt, although they were but a few seconds gone, that already they were ascending, she and the little engine—that already they

were leaving the mere world behind. They had passed a few dwellings. Now they crossed a bridge that spanned the muddy-brown yet silvery Llobregat.

Her mind could not put its finger on the spot or on the moment of the beginning of the real ascent. She knew that she was rising, rising, that the toy train was twisting, twisting.

She looked down upon the circles and crescents and ovals of diminishing hills, drawing in sharply her breath again at sight of the growing yet more and more diminutive panorama of terraced pink and white and green, at the increasing, multiplying nearness and shadow of the grey stone monster that they were climbing up upon; that now in reality brushed its shoulder against the small phlegmatic train, scraping the glass of a window with a loosened projection of its rough stone, while from her own outer side of the vehicle she was staring down across sheer declivitous depth, where the flank of the car, God saving its unerring wheels, hung verily out over space, space that conceived and re-conceived the golden sunshine in a more and more minutely spun web of thin gilt, over the further and further falling hills of incessant pink, incessant white, incessant green.

And now, the train like an insect burrowed its nose directly into the side of the stone mountain, and after an instant of blackness, a few rods of man-made tunnel in an out-shooting, inaccessible detail of the monster, drew in on to a ledge of grey rock—its destination.

She stepped down from the car with the curious, and correct, impression that she was leaving all modernity, all recent and confusing human invention, behind her. And here, standing, as the woman was standing, in the jurisdiction of God's whim, was the erstwhile yellow ant-hill, the world-known monastery, the Monasterio del Montserrat.

She had walked toward the portal letting into the courtyards of the sacred buildings, but even on this brief way, startled by the scream of the departing train, she

had turned, and in the open space left clear by the vanished little inventive toy of humanity, had caught a sudden view across the huge cleft on which the monastery hangs, and of all the exquisite loveliness of the place; and under the courtyard portal she fell down upon her knees, turned half backward, in the impulsive instantaneousness of her posture, toward the beauty of the opposing grey-green mountain-side and its mad yet peaceful terraces and climbing, clinging statues of brilliant white marble that tell, in their startling snowy relief against the towering rock, the terrible story of Christ's ascent of Calvary.

"Dio! Dio!" she stammered. "Did I call myself a Spaniard, when I had not seen *that*? Did I sing 'Kundry' when I had not seen that?"

And like Kundry, she was limp and pathetic as, having lifted herself up and with effort crossed the courtyards of the monastery, she drew herself slowly into the edifice of the Holy Grail.

The dim church, lustrous through its constant dusk with the dull-glowing sheen of its luxurious gold and its candle-light, was sparsely peopled, its congregation mainly peasant pilgrims, simple, devout, and happy. Service was monotonously, soothingly under way. Two hundred candles, about the altar and pendulous above it in gently vibrating candelabra, burned against the streaking, filtered sunlight. The chant of priests and responsive, slow male choir quavered Latin over the bent peasant heads.

The service done, she went, knowing the small traditions of the place, forward through the nave and past side-shrines to a stair behind the altar, and mounting its spiral approached the brown, Moorish Virgin who sits in a votive niche balconied high above the chancel, smooth and stoic as a female Buddha. She kissed it. Then she left the church.

She halted in the *vestibulo*, dazzled and confused by the abrupt glare of midday sun shimmering on the court-

yards, and the white statues of the ravishing mountain-side. Before the church, seated on the pavement, reclined a family of peasants, chatteringly devouring their meal. One of them promptly rose and after the national custom, despite his awe and bashfulness at her attire, pressed her to share their food.

When she had risen, wonderfully strengthened by the rough fare of hard sausage and hard bread and pink early wine, she stepped toward the dirty, pretty mother of the numerous family, a woman thin and old from childbearing, not from years.

"Madre," she said, laying her hand on the tired, youthful frame that struggled respectfully to its feet, "would you remember me?"

"Indeed, before God, señora, to have eaten with a lady, could my kind forget it?"

"Yet let me give you a keepsake—for you to use, madre, as you may see fit, for the 'keepsake' part can easily be from memory indeed. It is not to pay for my food—no, no! But to thank you for harbouring one who might have been a foreigner in your land. As it is, I am Spanish. Go you with God." And she dropped a heavily jewelled ring into the thin gnarled hand, and went toward the gardens which, beyond the back of the church, run to the brink of the ledge and overhang the beautiful far, far valleys.

The gasping woman followed her and clung to her.

"Señora! Señora! Let me say to you what my husband must not hear!"

Her eyes were glittering, and she was shaking so that the jewels were glittering like them on her palm.

"We made this pilgrimage on foot to ask a miracle of God! Our house and little farm are mortgaged and we had not wherewith to pay! And the Blessed Virgin has intervened for us and answered us! You have answered us, with a miracle of jewels! Are you the Virgin? Are you the Madonna?" With a quivering hand she stroked the woman's cloak that was so ashine in the sun-

light. "Let me make confession to you, then! I was tired, tired! And had the miracle not happened—ah, I knew how I could make one mouth the less to feed!"

With a shudder, her stranger-friend grasped her shoulders, then let the seizing hands glide up to the thin face.

"I understand! The Virgin understands! But *you*? No! No! It is not Spanish! And you have children—you have a husband! Yet, dear, the Virgin understands! What she would say to you is, go you *with* God, not *to* Him! Remember, *you are loved!*"

She pointed back to the group of laughing children, and went on into the sunlit gardens.

When she came to the end of the brilliantly flowered path and looked about her, the realization of height made her again draw in her breath with a sharp little sound.

Above her, the intense gay blue of the sky was mapped over with thick bulks of white, shining, moving cloud. Below her, the far serpentine valley of the Llobregat twined among the countless distances of soft pink hills. Between that blue of the distant sky and the pink of the seemingly far more distant hills, the two colours appeared to meet and amalgamate in patches of lavender that floated through the gold of the sunlight between earth and heaven. On her right hand, across from her and as high in air as herself, stood the series of white religious statues immovably climbing, climbing, against the grey flank of the mountain beyond the gorge.

She lifted up her face and her trembling hands.

"Already, I have climbed high, O mi Dio, have I not?"

Turning, she retraced her way among the many-coloured flowers of the gardens, past the nestling church, and into the courtyards.

For the hospitality of the Monasterio del Montserrat, no pay is asked. Those who stop in the whitewashed convent rooms and sleep in the whiter linens, will probably be grateful. And the offerings of their gratitude are

made, if made at all, to a clerk in a little office of the monastery, as they go away.

She went across the paving-stones to this office, and approached the clerk.

"I have an offering to make, Señor."

"You have slept here, Señora?"

"No, Señor. But I wish to make the gift to-day." She drew from beneath her cloak a carven box. It held the whole remainder of her burden of jewels. None other wealth, of any kind, was left to her now . . . unless, perhaps, the rich creamily beautiful cloak itself . . . unless, perhaps, the richly blue simple string of beads suavely accompanying it around her throat were worldly valuable. . . . She did not open the jewel-box—and knew that his country's courtesy would prevent him from it in her presence—for she did not wish great notice taken of her. But even so he stared at it, and at her. "But, Señora, such a gift is not in my province! To make such an offering you must see——"

"See whom you choose, *amigo*. Attend to it for me, so?"

"Excuse me, excuse me, but no, Señora!" For he had felt the weight of it, extraordinary for a thing so fragile, and had hastened, first his words, and then himself away, against the dread possibility of seeming rudeness. When he returned it was with a black-robe, old and fair of face, calm, as would be here, and quiet, soft, and sweet, as would be too.

And to the prayer-gemmed hands of this old monk the woman consigned this last material burden of hers.

"Señora," he said, "our custom is to take only when our hospitality has been taken. Mañana, then——"

"But this afternoon," she said, "I go on up to the peak of San Jerónimo—and you must know, padre, that some day or other, even for us Spaniards there will be no mañana!"

"My dear," he smiled gently back to her smile, "for

Spaniards who believe in God, always there is a to-morrow!"

"But this—this kind of gift," she said, hesitant from pressing its nature but pressed to her argument, "must be left in your care while I am gone, so if yours to-morrow, why not yours to-day? Shall you make me carry it with me? For—padre—even so little a package as this can be a burden when—when one is trying to climb! . . . And—I understand it is a long climb, is it not?"

"Indeed yes, and for a woman, Señora! There lies the Bad Valley!" She had closed his two hands upon the jewel-box, her own emanating the feminine persuasiveness that renders malleable even the exclusive lovers of Christ; and holding it now in one hand—and unopened, for he was as Spanish as his clerk—with the other he pointed, his gesture beginning just yonder with some rough-hewn steps, and sweeping onward widely across the fissure. "I can read the history of its creation, a history as wonderful as that this very church should afterward have possessed the Holy Grail, rewritten in your eyes as you gaze at it, for you are evidently one who reads. May you read but such beauties always! There begins the wound of it. There it lies!"

"Yes, padre, I have read—I—I know—something of the *Valle Malo*! So I go first directly up those steps?"

"It is the way. But you have procured a guide, yes?"

"No, padre, I do not wish a guide."

"But alone? It is impossible, my child! And for a woman, more than impossible! Shall I call a guide for you?"

"No! No! I am a Spaniard—I do not need a guide in Spain!" And to stop his coming further protest she hastened: "Anyway, it is safe to go a little way, is it not?"

"Yes, yes, Señora, if you are not afraid of the dizzy steps. It is safe to go as far up as the great gorge just above—as far as the steps are hewn out. But no further,

and only in the light. And the sun goes down swiftly here, once it starts, my child!"

"Ah," she said, "and that darkness as of Golgotha is coming again quickly! And I must start through it! But—I am not afraid! I thank you, Father! Go you with God!"

"Go *you* with God, my dear!" And he called after her: "And there on the chasm-side, hold fast to the rail!"

She crossed the little plaza that stood, holding up the toy railway station and a diminutive market, between the portal and the towering rock, and began the ascent. The dirt path led suddenly into the ruggedly out-hewn steps, which rose cruder and cruder along the side of the gorge. Looking back, she saw the monastery and its church and vivid-coloured gardens spread in sharp design just below her; and in the midst, lovely as an intentional part of pattern, the motionless figure of her old new friend like a crucifix of ebony in the courtyard.

For with his present he had been like a child on Christmas morning—and with likely more reason than a child-of-the-world's, here where to these black-dressed children of white hearts every night that shows a star is Christmas night, and every afternoon that allows a cloud is Good Friday afternoon, and every single dawn, rain, shine, or thunderbolt, is Easter dawn—and almost instantly he had opened the box, enjoying its tiny key, and then, at the brilliantly sunlit dazzle into his eyes of its magnificent display, he had cried out, eyes wide gazing after her, arms wider, forthflung in his dumbfoundment.

From this last friend, this vivid picture of him, she looked on momentarily around her. On one side of her rose the huge surface of rock, on the other, empty space dropped itself fearfully down through the narrow chasm. Framed by its rugged walls, there met her eyes a bright, tinted picture of sky and clouds and of the far-off valley below.

Across its beautiful colours, like a moat in sunshine a

little black thing was crawling. It was the toy train, creeping once more up from Monistrol. Once more, man's invention had come within her vision.

"But it has nothing to bring me, O God!" she said, and turning her back upon it, she went slowly on.

The rock up which the rough steps led was a fragment of the mountain which had looked, from the monastery, like an oval pebble set on end.

It was two hundred feet high.

It was but one of innumerable formations, gigantic and grey and conical, that rose all about. The walls closed in behind her. The early twist of the huge chasm had shut away the monastery. She was alone, in a wilderness of primeval stone. Not rough and peaked, but smooth and massively gentle like mad inverted stalactites, the wild forms reared above her through the air. She was in the *Valle Malo*.

She went on and on, her breath caught and caught again at the multiplying loveliness of the weird and monstrous shapes. Infinitely higher than the rocks, against the glowing blue sky hung one glittering cloud, pure white as a poised dove.

Before her, softly green amid the riotous grey, a little grove of pines stood on a plateau of shelving granite.

She pressed forward to it, and turned among the stunted trees to look down upon the strange magnificence of the gorge. Her arms leapt out in a passionate gesture, and physical speech broke from her.

"So, I have passed you, I have passed you, *Valle Malo!* I have passed you at last, and human things and people can touch me no more! See, I am beyond you! What thing or person, in the whole human world, can strike, can bruise me now? The world that lies below you, now lies also below me! God has granted that I have passed you! He bade me climb, and I have done His bidding! I have still to climb—but *you* are passed, is it not so, *Valle Malo?* All things pass! Once it was trudge, trudge, trudge. That is long gone, and now it

is but climb, climb, climb! Yes, it is even *you* that I have now passed in my climb to God's Market, to-day!"

She knew that the Bad Valley still stretched on and on ahead; but to the poetry of her mind, as to the poetry of the simple Catalonian peasant's, the symbol of it concentrated and spent itself in the beautiful desolate gorge that she indeed had just passed, and now, as she pushed through the grove of pines and up the shard-strewn trail into the further wildernesses of stone, the exaltation of the heights was upon her.

Of necessity a great terror lay at the bottom of her soul. But it was truly at the bottom of that soul, numb and insignificant under the blissfully evaporating weight of her worse terror, that of the world from which she fled; and with her back to the fearful emblematic chasm, and her gradually slower and slower steps leading on and up through the intermingled stone and verdure, an unspeakable peace came more and more upon her, creeping down to her from its eternal brooding on the sublime heights surrounding her and before her.

She was in the region of the huge stone grotesques that build up the fantastical crown of the Sacred Mountain. Here, there, and everywhere, wonderful in their weird shapes marked out against the sky, they stood grey and naked and immobile like Titan sentinels.

And as she went marvelling on and on, one and then another and another and another, seemed to take on more than accidental form. From their mere likeness to great battlements and towers, nearer and more near they progressed to shapes of giant boasts: a monster crouching cat; a fabulous dromedary; an elephant far vaster than a mastodon, its distorted trunk trickling down along the blue of the heavens like a rivulet of granite. They had the filmy trick and fascination of clouds, in which men read startling forms. But unlike clouds, they were real, stable, as though created thus deliberately. It was as if God, æons ago in the dim age of His making of the astounding pinnacles, had had some fleeting thoughts of

forms of life He would later undertake, and His vague shadowy ideas had caught themselves, and been tangibilized, in the formative nature of the molten stone.

Here in the isolation, where time was of as little import as the elements, where elements and time were things of sheer sequence, not pregnant consequence, the coming of sunset, though it told the human creature who had come into the region that she must have climbed for hours, yet brought her no feeling of surprise, beyond that of its radiant glory.

"Verily, 'here Time and Space are one!'" she breathed; and the strange words from the great Grail drama, always queer to her, held now some new significance, as if the familiarity that had been for her in their oddness had been prophetic, of a sympathy, stirred then, with something that had become real finally, here and now, buckling the distant painted panoramic fascination to the immense actuality of these corresponding vaster marvels in the "now and here" that were one; while all the queerness stopped in it still, keeping the thought, the sense, with all this added sensation, still a thing ineffable literally, no more to be told than it already was in those almost senseless words. It seemed to her, here and now, as if they must inevitably have been written, whether from near or far, into the greatest of all art-expressions of the Grail significances, in attempt to suggest in helpless tangibility something of the one quality common to all the elements of God—something of . . . *this*; her thoughts wending with her as if art, a spirit, must follow any who came out of wildernesses and touched it once, no matter how soon, or far, or immolate they might go back away from it into wilderness again. . . . For this, in absolute sooth, fact and truth, was wilderness—wilderness very, though wilderness sublime.

As she went reverently on again in the bright shimmer, a turn of her hard shelving path brought her opposite a solitary great desolate grotesque that halted her in silent wonder before it.

It was a face—a woman's distorted face, aspiring stark against the sky, bent back, with closed eyes lifted to God. It was ugly, hideous—the face of what the world in its cruel brevity of thought would call a hag. It was agonized. It was a face of age, tremendous age; yet its pain seemed that of a woman in child-labour. And withal its torture, the horrible twisted mouth seemed to smile—to smile ineffably through its anguish, as if its eternal stone trouble held the ecstatic triumph and peace of Creation.

The woman who gazed up at her was seized with a sense of shame that she stood in this presence clothed as she was, in costly garments. But her instinctively lowering eyes fell upon the hands that had as instinctively lifted in awe toward it, and seeing that they were bare, she remembered that she had already paid her full tribute of baubles. Satisfied, she went on, with one lingering backward look; and the increasing cold of the winds that swirled down at her from the summit told her it was well that she had not followed her impulse, if she still would climb, and stripped off, to lay before that terrific entity, the heavy cloak.

As she went up and up, more and more steeply, her path dimming and sometimes quite vanishing at great slanting spaces of slippery stone, suddenly through the moaning of the wind a different yet a kindred howling reached her ears: it was the baying of hounds, warning her that she neared the peasant's lodge basing the utmost pinnacle of San Jerónimo.

Looking through a passage of the rocks, she could see the tall slope and its naked little chapel against the burning sunset. This was man's highest attainment of the mountain. But, sacramental, finely religious as the attainment was, still it spelt the world of humanity, and she turned her back upon it.

Through another stone rift, before her rose another far grey peak, and in the anxious measure of her eyes

it looked even higher—a very little higher. And gladly, she started toward it.

It stood isolate and forbidding as any of its grotesque companions; but though its approach was arduous and full of small dangers, the formation was that of a slowly rising ridged plateau, and its conquest proved only a struggle with slipping shards, her aid little stunted trees that bent resentfully, threateningly under her seizure, and her last enemy glassy surfaces of glazed slate sandstone between foothold and foothold.

With a last effortful step, she came abruptly out upon the summit.

As she stood there she was like a carven figure topping a giant idol, supreme in air above the world.

In a great disc surrounding her, in a great half-sphere overhead, were the regal colours of sunset.

Red.

Gold.

And countless tones of violet, from the soft blue-lavender of clouds floating out near the molten sun, to the deep purples thickening in the east.

She seemed cut away on the very apex of earthy things. "Stone Watchwoman" old legend would have called her. San Jerónimo was behind her, shut off from her.

"Have I now climbed high? At last, O God, at last!"

The flat rock hung out over space, and she ran toward the edge and paused but a step from it.

The world that she had deserted lay spread in an endlessly stretching map below her, prodigal, limitless in its sublime multitude of coloured hills, their ceaseless variety of undulations making a smoothness, in her far vision, like the smoothness of a most finely rippling sea. Though she cast her eyes directly down the fearful drop of huge mountain-side, she could not see the monastery. It was somewhere lost to vision among the myriad serrations. Though she could see the pink and white and green and yellow of the melting hills, she could not see

Monistrol. Though she herself was wrapped like a Madonna in a glory of light, the valleys were already shifting from their brilliant garb of day into their dim and dimmer clothes of night. About her, here and there in the lavender and violet, a few pale silver stars were shining. Beneath her, the light on the skin of the snaking Llobregat was changing from a shimmer to a gleam.

The maddeningly dizzy height fell sheer below her fascinated eyes. But despite the torn winds that she could hear moaning wildly hither and yonder among the lonely peaks, she knew that she was supremely secure in will-power until the precise moment that was God's own, and hers.

A sudden gust eddied around her, swirling her delicate skirts and her cloak spirally, into the likeness of a vortex of tinted sand or of tinted water. Perfectly balanced, she leaned back confidently, daringly against the whirl of air. It ceased. There was again complete stillness.

And standing there with her feet a few perilous inches from space, through the creeping, softly multiplying darkness of the coming velvet night, her head lifted back with upturned face like that of the tortured woman in perennial stone somewhere below her, Dulce once more addressed herself to God.

CHAPTER XLI

THE WAY

"SO, I am at the end of my Gran Via, O God! One step more, and the Great Way at last is over for me!

"It is for other steps, O God, that I try to pay with this one.

"For having looked to the right and to the left, I now look only ahead, where no eyes can see anything.

"I have tried and tried in every other way to pay.

"Perhaps this is the *great* way. Perhaps this is full payment, expiation.

"For blindly leaving Cadiz, I paid—oh, I paid!—with that next blind step that so soon followed Cadiz, O God, with its terrible bargain that I did not think about or understand.

"For that blind step I have tried also to pay—and to—to *honourably* pay! Well, I think, I *think*, at last I will have paid.

"I say I did not think about or understand it, yet everyone, no matter how thoughtless or how blind, understands somewhat, and there must necessarily have been some badness in me. For that badness I have tried to pay. I have tried to pay for it in money, for one thing. I suppose You despise money, God. But I thought it was right to pay back in that, and until You showed me that it would be wrong to go on paying so, I paid and paid.

"As for this last wrongdoing, Dio mio, this defiance against that unwritten commandment of Yours which people say is as great as any of Your written commandments, the one against self-destruction, for this I ask no leniency, I make no apology. For I know that You understand.

"And though I have said that it ends the Gran Via for me, yet I do this knowing that it is never finished.

"I know that with this blind present step it only begins again for me, in some manner known only to You.

"For I have learned that the Gran Via goes everywhere—before birth, and beyond death; and that I have known only a little of it.

"Yet I dare, O God, to take this one step more—this last step of the little of Your great way that I have known, which will be also the first of the little, or much, of it, that I am, through it, yet to know.

"I, Wanda of the Stars, find myself only Dulce again, and step out to try to find my name among those stars, that dot the Gran Via beyond my present understanding. I step out, as blindly as I stepped out from Cadiz in the beginning, in order to—escape."

As she had spoken, at each word the quickening darkness had gone a step of its own across the sky, turning the lingering purples one by one to black; and as if her mention of the stars had been a command to them, they had come suddenly out by twos and threes and then myriads, armying the black firmament as with softly glinting battalions and finally whole regiments, that shed upon it, and down through the night from it, a wan, exquisite green.

"I offer no excuse, O Dio mio, just as I offer none for the wickedness of my trying to defy You, to swing Your pendulum back. You understood that.

"I tried to step backward along Your Gran Via against Your will, and You did not intend it and You did not allow it.—Oh, You are such a loving, *gentle* God! For to tell me so was Your only reproach of me! You meant that I should go on climbing. Well, I have climbed!

"Oh, Dio mio, that climbing! Even now, with but one more small step to take, I could yield to prayer and implore You to reward me for the years of climbing! To turn my bitterness to the sweet that my parents meant in naming me! For, O God, such is the vitality and despera-

tion of Your human insects that at this very instant there persists in me the yearning that some word of Yours whisper to me that sometimes at *heart* he desired me, that at some time since that instant in the Rambla of the Flowers, his soul desired to hold speech with mine! Yes, just such has been always mine, O God, and is mine now, even, coward-like I suppose, exactly as is my Faith, un-coward-like I am sure; a yearning that Your voice might speak to me some such exquisite thing, here on this pinnacle of the wilderness above the world, like a new Epiphany on the great road.

"You know, O God, for if ever You were paying attention to me You were just then, I am sure, that it was in such a manner of yearning that I took my little red book and posted it again, this time into his hotel, and not into a little princess—where it belonged, instead of to a substitute; and by myself, knowing You watching me, instead of by a messenger. Ah, even in my very bitterness and even angriness, all *pride* was already gone from me, O God, when I did *that*—one step, You see, nearer to *You*.

"Do I quibble, I who have not bragged, but indeed earnestly said, earnestly believing, that I especially love the truth? I think, O God, that I do not quibble, for what my thought was, in saying it must have brought me nearer to You, is this: Was it not right that, such a love having been his, he should know of it? Indeed, indeed, was not *much* of such rightness of thought and action in me then?

"And in my so-doing, that second and right posting of my little book, I think that all yearnings of earthen kinds ceased for me, O God, because I knew that all such kinds were what You had chosen to strip me of.

"And my last words to You with this voice that You temporarily put into my keeping should not be of regret for what You saw fit to take away, but of supplication that in my new Gran Via, the Gran Via of the stars, of the spaces and of the planets and of the constellations,

of the Milky Way that stretches above me now from Dulce to You, I may be free of the Trudge Market where I sold my body and perhaps—oh pity me!—my soul! Will it be the same henceforth—paying, paying, paying for having sold that body, when I have completely renounced and sacrificed it and left it far behind? Perhaps there is no such word or even meaning in the Universe as 'far.' But—ah——!"

And her arm stretched forth fearfully, though her eyes gazed fearfully upward:

"From the top of the Sacred Mountain to the black face of the twisting Llobregat is a great way!"

The arm fell back to her side; the eyes fell in a long gaze down, down; then lifted again.

"Shall I not then have paid?

"Or can it be that indeed the bargain entered my soul?

"In leniency to that soul, O Dio mio, credit me with this much, as You now look down upon me, me standing here alone and sacrificial upon the mountain-top: that I did not drag my loved-one down from any pinnacle, that my fall did not mean descent for him!

"I do not know, God, why You make men and women different. Though I was to have written upon that matter in my little red book, I have never known *why* the matter was wrong for me and not for him. And I do not ask. I do not know, I have never found out, whether You even *intended* it to be so. It is possible that the world looks at it as You do not, and that men and women are equally to blame.

"But *apparently* You mean it to be just as it is, and where I sinned in the little Street of the Carmen, presumably he did not.

"Credit me this, at least, O Dio mio, that—that I did him no harm. Credit me, that bad as I may be, at least in this last step of my expiation, I am not dragging him down with me. *So much of the prophecy remains unfulfilled, does it not? So much* You grant me, O mi

Dio, is it not so? And so much is at least *somewhat* beautiful to think of, is it indeed not so, Dio mio, *entree nous*, in this our lonely moment together, Yours and mine?"

Even the winds did not answer her. They had sunk down, moaning, among the crags, and thence torn away, off far into the heavens, sweeping clear the sky before her so that it was pure, deep, bright with its army of stars, and driving the clouds together in hurrying ranks that became battalions, regiments of their own, till they were like a great opposing host, banked in masses behind her.

Her face was still uplifted; her arms reached out toward the new brightness of the sky.

"And so much, *mi Dio*, as my sin was against the great whole of Society, I think that I have actually paid. For I tried in a far, far bigger way to pay—with the voice that You had said should be mine to take care of, and to do with.

"God, have You seen me try?

"Or to You am I but a worm that tries to crawl into Your sight, the leaf of a tree that tries to wave across Your vision, a grain of sand that tries to glitter in Your eyes? Do You see what separate persons try to do, or are You so very high that You see us only in masses, and ages, and huge grouped accomplishments?"

"I suppose You must see churches, God—great epoch-making cathedrals, great yearnings of whole peoples, like Notre-Dame. But do You see the little cathedrals made by individuals? Can it be, O God, that You read books? Do You examine pictures and statues? Can it be that through all the music of the spheres that surround You, You have heard me sing? Can it be possible that for one instant of Your enormous Time I have held the Universe still because You paused to listen to *me*?"

Far, far below her, a dim cluster of lights here, and a dim cluster there, and a dim cluster yet farther away shone softly in the darkness of the valley where little towns were resting; shone soft and dim as if the earth

repeated the sky—as if the lights of the peasant homes were but the reflection of the stars, as if truly, in God's eyes the architecture of even whole communities were but star-dust.

"If I have done that, then I need not have been calling to You now, for then You have already known that I have tried to build a picture, a statue, a cathedral, for the People, a book for them, even if it was seemingly but a little red book for one alone, still, a book, with my voice, for the *People*—Your People!"

Through the starlight, the voice she spoke of went up as softly as the dim lustre of the valley. But into the last words a vibrant note of passion had suddenly crept, and lifting her arms she cried:

"Lest You have never heard, I will sing to You here, now! Hearing, You shall see all of me, as I am! *Then* judge me! I will hold back nothing! I am alone with *You*, and I shall make myself believe that there is good, some good in me, I shall make *You* believe it! Listen to me, and see me, not as I made myself in the Trudge Market, not as I made myself afterward in the Market of Art, but as *You* have brought me to be, good and bad, *as I stand*, as I stand *here*, as I stand *poised* here! Listen, and hear me *make* the stars stand still!"

In the utter silence she leaned back, with opened lips, for one breathless moment, as if to hold the stars in wait as she might have held the audience of an earthly theatre. Then she swayed a half step forward, and from the breast that quivered over the very verge of the exalted rock, came the clarion cry of Valkyrie goddesshood, its "Ho-yo-to-ho!" ringing her command out to the stars.

"Ho-yo-to-ho!" It seemed to speed around the vast circle of the heavens, and as if it were a signal to the massed army of clouds behind her, a disseminating motion stirred them and they began to move slowly again around the sky toward her.

They were at liberty to move.

It was the stars that she had commanded to stand still.

And herself thrilled, removedly from herself as if she had been one of them, by the beauty of the brief thing she had done, her body seeming to echo it, her soul exquisitely calmed, she stepped satisfiedly back a pace along her rocky Gran Via of God's moment and hers, and sank into a little harsh nook of stones and stunted pine tree, to plan her next earthly-voiced bit of song to God, and with smiling-natured thoughts clustering forward to forward it. And their ringleader was: Had she ever, even in a Sevilla street, supposed she could not sing rightly in the open air? And her lips smiled silently up to God her present answer: a question upon a question: "I have climbed high, mi Dios, have I not?"

A great sense of Creation was with her, a sense of it that was of all of the beauty with its flavour of agony of that Stone Woman somewhere below. And her plan for song seemed perfected, perfected by the thought and symbol of that word "Creation," and she rose and stepped instinctively forward again. And there was now no need in the firmament for moving stars, for her voice swept into a nameless song of mingled tongues; of mingled musics; old, new, French, Italian, Spanish; whose colours and whose delicate vitalities filled the air with crystal-clear successions of pure tones like very showers of falling stars—showers that to her intoxicated mind seemed to be her whole art-nature fulfilling itself—by displaying its beauty naked to God and then falling to death.

And again she sank down, clinging with deep ecstatic relaxation to the little dwarfed pine tree and its rock, satisfied that she had done well, done, said her newest little arbitrary thought, better, for instance, than ever in any former theatre she had done, yes, done well even in herself, by herself, *Creating*.

And she *had* Created, *was* Creating; for a Catalan peasant, lodgekeeper of San Jerónimo, heard an angel sing on the top of the Sacred Mountain of Montserrat that night; and had his wife to witness with her ears there and her tongue; and had dogs that could not be

witnesses, but that had been soothed into quietude by the beauty of the voice. And another legend nowadays lives along with the Holy Grail at Montserrat.

And with breathing refreshed, breathing that she was now sure—yes, *satisfied*—could never be tormented by an earthly *sob* again, again she contemplated what she next should sing to God, and again she lifted up her body, and lifted up her face, and sang.

And again the song had sweepingly changed.

The first troop of the marching clouds had come within her vision. The army was defiling.

It was the beginning of their great *pasear* before her through the Spanish air.

And whether the song took on their nature, or their soft forms were moulded by her voice, the passionate never-written melody that now fled up to God was the pent music of her long abnegation of love, the smoulder of the smothered desire of the long years; and as it burst from her in wordless flames of wild unsatisfied yearning, the pale thin clouds that floated by were to her eyes like parades of starlit, pitiable nuns, all like the wan yellow nun at Mataró, all tramping desperately along toward God as best they could, driven, and helpless, and blind to the stars they passed—but too thin to hide the stars from other eyes.

They disappeared; and as the wild song of renunciation melted after them, new clouds, new music came.

It was now terrible music, terrible lilting music, brown music, of obscure beauty, as the great voice kept her promise to hold back nothing, to show herself completely, the naked bad as fully as the naked good. And as the pulsing, insinuating rhythms exotically joined the night, they were now terrible clouds that passed before her, thick clouds which in the nature of their beauty must obscure the stars. She shut her eyes, and poured and poured out the perhaps evil period of her music as if to bring forth its fullness quickly and be done with it, to

let the last lingering element of it quiver for ever from her nature.

And quiet, contemplative, she sat with those eyes still closed in the little happy, harsh throne of rock and dwarf-tree. She knew what she wished to sing last of all to God. How strange, that it should be thus that at last she was to sing it!

When she reopened her eyes she saw only the bright quiet stars again. The sky was cloudless.

And quietly, but strongly, she again rose and stepped forward, and to the very verge.

And the glad wealth of ravishing song that now rushed from her toward the sky's shining hosts was the music of her fullest art-ambition, and the only music that could sound the ambition of her love—adored music, silently adored until now, the music of Isolde.

With her whole art, her whole will, her whole unnameable Faith, she projected it straight out at those stars.

In the huge conviction of her music-ecstasied soul, they were standing still to listen.

It was to the stars alone that Dulce sang her love-song on and on, note by note nearer to the death-hymn at its end.

Ecstatically soft, again and again the lullaby of death breathed out upon God's hushed Gran Via.

So still, so tender were the moments and the elements, that it was as if God, with even His work done, were listening with His stars as for the last time the voice uttered the immaculately dying phrases. And as she swayed gently with their melody more and more delicately poised over the edge, in her imagination building the stars into the body of her dead love at her feet, the darkness of the sky was as subtly, as if in its own imagination, fainting into tones. Its colour was soft; a pale colour of grey that had come from black, and that only hinted of an unshining white-blue that would as inevitably come from grey.

The voice with infinite gentleness sank through the last note, and stopped—to rise again in quick, desperate human words.

“Then farewell, and I greet You, O mi Dio! Must I go to You with my arms stretched up to plead with You, or will You let me fold them on my breasts, as if I were a pure Madonna? Oh, mi Dio, let this one last step be to Your liking! *Will* You answer me?”

And God answered.

“Dulce!”

Suffused with astonished terror at the agonized sound, she turned. It had been God’s answer in the voice that she so long had thought of as the voice of God. The arms for whose guidance she had prayed went neither upward nor to her bosom; they sprang out, imploringly, before her.

She seemed to see only the stars—madly moving stars. But even doubt left her and left the last vibrations of her wild cry of unbelief, for arms had seized her, seeming to strike her, as the strangled moaning shout of that voice had struck her. Nor could doubt recur to her, for the bruising clasp of those arms filled her reaching soul with the sickening joy of the actual touch of flesh and flesh—an ecstasy that, though it mingled more and more with the seeming rush of wings about her, did not cease; and still did not cease; and yet did not cease; and seemed to generate and prolong itself; and prolong, and prolong, and prolong itself, into a great way—a great way that stretched out from all her senses that were deliciously assailed by the odour of the little dwarf pine tree nook, and the mercilessly crushing arms that had carried her there, and were protecting her from the harshness of its very protection, and the voice, *that* voice, which as her face streamed helpless, helpless tears, was helplessly, helplessly kissing it, and streaming down at it helpless, helpless words.

“Oh, my own, my own, my own! You would have done *that*—and after your little books! Were they not

enough for my heart and soul to live through? But I have you at last—O God, God, You have answered me!—I have you in my arms, never to be taken away from me again! Dulce! I love you! I love you! Do you know what those three words mean? They are all of life! And I have the vanity to know that they are to you, having read your little books! Oh, my dear, my sweet, it was a horrible blunder at the opera! Isabel did not tell me *how* she knew Madame de l'Etoile, or *why* she wanted to see you! I saw in your eyes what you thought of me, and I suffered as *you* did, though I did not know that you were suffering then—you, the great lady, who must have despised me until she ceased to care, long ago!

"Dulce, *my* Dulce, all this time I have been looking, waiting, searching, longing for you—*calling* you! The very night I left you I went back and tried to find you—yes, I followed a figure that I saw in the small hours in the Carmen, out along the Mediterranean road to Mataró, thinking it you—not to tell you I loved you, for I did not know yet that I did, but to try to do something right. And I thought I saw you in Paris, at the Opéra, and thought afterward I had been mistaken. Yet always I hunted. And I tried again in Cadiz, when I had just given up the hope of it and had learned of you so miraculously from Isabel. Oh, Dulce, Dulce! And in the meantime, I had thought, and felt, yes, felt too, and decided I would not marry. But I found *she* cared, and I thought that was what I *must* do. But even so, I stayed in Spain, and hunted, hunted. And all through this time of my marriage, which I thought might make me forget, I have only remembered, with times of the worst suffering on earth, Dulce, that I hope you, dear, never will have suffered—*resignation*. And from that I would wake to new need, the need to *hope*, and I would *call* you. Yes, I began that imaginative calling that first year, right after my marriage, and always I have been calling you, *from high places*. Once I went back to Spain, and called you in the watch-tower of Tibidabo, and afterward I stood

again and again in the Rambla of the Flowers, watching the little Royal, and wishing you would walk out of those swinging doors and again speak to me! And when we have been in Paris, I have *run* from Isabel, yes, from dear, pure, unknowing Isabel, and gone to the Etoile, and to the top of the Arc de Triomphe, and called, called, called you from there—called to you across waters and through spaces: *Dulce, Dulce, Dulce!* Yes, when I had followed you after the opera at Covent Garden, and after the dear, dear little red books at the Savoy, and had managed to trace you, and *saw* you in Paris stepping into the train at the Quai d'Orsay, and was barred out, one second too late, then in my torture I went as I had used to do, to the Arc de Triomphe, and called you again, a long, long call, *Du-u-ulce!* And it was that cry, with the prayer from my heart in it, that you heard just now—I know that you heard it coming, coming, just as your voice was actually guiding me up and up through the rocks and darkness to reach you and save you—yes, I know that it was what made you pause for that last question of God over the edge, where my soul would have followed you into darkness, my Dulce, my darling, my soul, my life, my own!”

“Oh,” she breathed, drinking in his last kiss ecstatically, drawing away from him, rising, “oh, I can stand now!”

And standing beside her in the rose-growth of the dawn, his arm around her shoulders, he cried joyously:

“And we can start down together now! Together into the new life that is to be ours after all the waiting and learning, all the suffering, all your little red books and all my calling; the life that we shall live according to your every desire, *with you the guide*, only choosing and asking, and that I shall live entirely for you, leaving you only at your bidding, otherwise always beside you! Oh, my own, my sweet, you *do* look strong enough now, the strength shines there in your face, and now, instantly, we can start down together!”

And his caressing hands drew her toward the descent.

"Darling," she breathed, standing where she was, one of her hands lifting, "tell me once more, just once, looking me in the eyes, and then my soul need never question it again—you love me?"

"I have told you," he said, his eyes shining, "that these three words mean the whole of life: *I love you!*"

For a long moment she stood with her face uplifted in an abandon of quiet rapture; and then she said:

"Then, darling, try to comprehend this: You and I must not now, or at any time, together, *start down*. You and I together must go always simply on, and on! Oh, José, after *that*," and she pointed to the abyss that was growing full of golden mists, "and after—*this*, ourselves—I am almost a madwoman; but *as* I am now, I can best understand God, and though I adore you, and now know that—that you—love *me*—we—we must not have that beautiful life you plan, my own!"

"Dulce!" he cried.

"Think!" she said gently, quietly. "There is your marriage!"

"Dulce," he cried trembling, "what is that to our love?"

"It is everything to our love, José Luis!"

"Darling, darling," he cried, "what do you mean? Surely, surely, such a love as ours justifies anything!"

"Yes!" she said, smiling quietly, rapturously. "Yes, it justifies even such an infinitude of trustfulness as fills my soul and must fill yours! Are many people blessed as you and I are? Has there been a greater love?"

And he cried out passionately: "No!"

"Then, dear, it must have no stain, even the most forgivable, most justified stain! It must be so capable, so proud in its capability, that it can be in our eyes like a rich pure jewel on the hand! I am a free spirit. You have the world to consider—and—Isabel."

"She would divorce me," he said simply.

And as simply she answered: "You are a Catholic."

"Oh, my own," he burst out passionately, "my own, why at this moment of all moments——"

"Because, darling," she said, swiftly, but very quietly, "in my bliss, my ineffable happiness at the goodness of God, I understand His meanings as never before. What are *these* things, these bodies, to you and me? We have our love! We know at last! We know, José, my own! What do we need, more than that vast, indescribably beautiful fact? And, my José, remember the *reason* of your marriage, reason greater afterward than before: *Isabel loves you!*"

"Not as you and I love!" he cried.

"Not only is she your wife," said Dulce softly. "She is Isabel. *A part of me belongs to her!*" And she lifted from around her throat and held out to him the Astarte beads. "My darling, take these back to her. Tell her you followed me. Dear, sunlit soul, never knowing that sorrow is her guest, she will always think you did it for her sake. These are the part of me, my José Luis, that belongs to Isabel—the treasure of mine that—that had never been bought or sold—that will mean, for ever to you and me, the beauty, yes, the *rightness* of our love." And she finished with exquisite gentleness: "Are we right, my own?"

He looked into her eyes for a silent long moment; then, straightening his shoulders, his voice husky, he said: "Yes."

"Tell her that if the Great Way ever joins our paths again, hers and mine, never again will I refuse to see her, José Luis!"

"And your life?" he cried, suffering, suddenly irresolute, helpless. "What will it be? Where will you be? What will you do?"

"I do not know yet!" she exclaimed readily, calmly. "I will simply do whatever God tells me to do. What does it matter, whether I spend it *singing* for you, to *People*, in theatres, or *praying* for you, to God, in a convent? I could be a nun, now, or I can still sing—

now—Isolde! God will tell me presently. You see, my darling, *it simply does not matter!*"

"What matters," he cried out, "is that we—we *might doubt!*"

"Doubt?" she cried with an exquisite little flutter of laughter. "Doubt, when this, our love, is one from which God, in my little books and in your calling from high places, has burned and burned away all alloy until it is utterly pure, pure metal?"

He caught her back into his arms and bent over her with his cry:

"The pure metal of God, that will last——"

"For ever," she whispered, letting him lift her face up to his kiss, "and ever!"

And with the kiss, with passionately solemn repetition of it, and of her words, he said:

"For ever and for ever!"

"I will watch you," she said, her hands leading him to the descendant slope of the rock, and gently, caressingly urging him, lingeringly, a little, and a little, and a little, away from her, "till you grow small, small, small in the distance, or until you are hidden by the wonderful, aspiring crags, my own!"

He had done her silent bidding, letting himself down so that now in the gold and rose light of the full resplendent day that had grown with the fullness of their love around them she was like some lovely statue to which his face gazed wonderingly up; and suddenly came a break in his courage, and his hands clasped her feet desperately, even his brow bending to them for an instant, and then his voice lifting to her desperately with his eyes.

"Oh, Dulce, Dulce, should we not—oh, I have no words to put it into, but should we not somehow, somewhere, go together, up mountains and down? Deep in our two souls do we both know that we are right? Are we fair to ourselves, now that we have found each other, you and I—after—after—all this Great Way?"

She bent slightly over him, but with exaltation, with arms flung wide.

"Oh, my own," she cried, "my *own*, I now *know* that there is one thing, though *but* one thing, further than the Great Way—God has told me—and that is: the Greater Way!"